NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY SERIES

SRI AUROBINDO

NAVAJATA





NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA





SRI AUROBINDO

His quest for finding a meaning in life led the author finally to Pondicherry, where he settled down in 1952, having renounced a successful business career.

Sri Navajata (*b* 1922) is intimately connected as General Secretary and Treasurer with the Sri Aurobindo Society and Auroville, an international cultural township dedicated to the realisation of the ideals of human unity, human dignity and human happiness.

The author is actively engaged in interpreting Sri Aurobindo's life, work, vision and teaching.

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Dedicated to The Mother

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PREFACE

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE visiting the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry happily partake of the pervading peaceful atmosphere which is most marked in the main building where The Mother is in residence. Here in the courtyard is the *samadhi* of Sri Aurobindo. A huge tree (botanical name *Peltophorum ferrugineum*) about 35 ft in height and named by The Mother *The Service Tree*, forms a natural canopy over the *samadhi*. Around the *samadhi sadhaks* and visitors alike meditate: some aspire to open themselves to the Divine Consciousness, others concentrate on realising a total supramental transformation, while others yet again offer their worldly sorrows and difficulties at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and pray for his help. It is no wonder that they all receive help according to their receptivity, because The Mother has said: 'Sri Aurobindo has not left us—Sri Aurobindo is here as living and as present as ever and it is left to us to realise his work with all the sincerity, eagerness and concentration necessary.' And again: 'Lord, this morning Thou hast given me the assurance that Thou wouldst stay with us until Thy work is achieved, not only as a consciousness but also as a dynamic Presence in action. In unmistakable terms Thou hast promised that all of Thyself would remain here and not leave the earth atmosphere until earth is transformed. Grant that we may be worthy of this marvellous Presence and that henceforth everything in us be concentrated on the one will to be more and more perfectly consecrated to the fulfilment of Thy sublime work.'

Sri Aurobindo left his body in the early hours of the morning (at 1.26 a.m.) on December 5, 1950. A supramental light enveloped his body, stopping its decomposition. So the body lay in state for over four-and-a-half days and was laid in the *samadhi* only on the afternoon of December 9, 1950. On the marble *samadhi*, always bedecked with beautifully arranged flowers, are inscribed the following words:

> To THEE who hast been the material envelope of our Master to THEE our infinite gratitude. Before THEE who hast done so much for us, who hast worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured so much, before THEE who hast willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before THEE we bow down and implore that we may never forget even for a moment, all we owe to THEE.

The question naturally arises: how did Sri Aurobindo will all, attempt all, prepare and achieve all for us ?

An answer to this query is at once difficult and easy. 'No one can write about my life because it has not been on the surface for man to see,' wrote Sri Aurobindo. But what little has been on the surface for man to see is itself overwhelming. Moreover, in his writings Sri Aurobindo has thrown light on his inner life and his action on the inner planes. From these writings one can surmise what he has done for earth. In this book we have tried to reproduce as far as possible Sri Aurobindo's own words, so that the reader may appreciate them according to his own level of consciousness and benefit from the spiritual power all his writings carry.

Sri Aurobindo is remembered as a great nationalist who fought for India's independence, admired as a great writer and poet, revered as a great yogi—but all these eulogies are our limited assessment of his divine personality.

Science has spoken of an ascending evolution in Nature which goes from the stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man. In India the process of evolution has been symbolised in the Puranic description of the ten *avatars:* Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Nrisingh, Vaman, Parashuram, Ram, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki. Sri Aurobindo says that in this process of evolution man is only a transitional being, not the last; he will be surpassed. He is living in a mental consciousness; he has latent faculties in him, faculties beyond mind and intuition—the Truth-Consciousness, the Supermind. Even though in the natural course of evolution the Supermind will evolve, that will take thousands of years. This evolution, however, can be expedited here and now. Then life on earth will change; the mind of man will become a mind of light in which all knowledge will be self-possessed and even the physical body will undergo a transformation, becoming a body of light. Everything on earth will change. The Life Divine will become a palpable fact.

The true significance of this will come home to all after the integral transformation has taken place and even the body has changed. Today only a few can visualise it.

The future will hail Sri Aurobindo as an *avatar* who ushered in the Supramental Age. The Mother has said in this connection: 'Sri Aurobindo incarnated in the

human body the supramental consciousness and has not only revealed to us the nature of the path to follow and the method of following it so as to arrive at the goal, but has also by his own personal realisation given us the example; he has provided us with the proof that the thing can be done and the time is now to do it.' As an *avatar* who came to lead the earth to a supramental transformation, he naturally had to bear the brunt of battle with the forces of Nature. In *Savitri*, his epic poem, Sri Aurobindo expresses this in the following lines:

> But when God's messenger comes to help the world
> And lead the soul of earth to higher things,
> He must carry the yoke he came to unloose,
> He too must bear the pangs that he would heal.

Sri Aurobindo's advent on the earth has been specifically for this purpose. 'Since the beginning of earth history, Sri Aurobindo has always presided over the great earthly transformations, under one form or another, one name or another,' affirms The Mother. His whole earthly life was a continuous effort to create certain conditions and manifest the Supermind. His early childhood in Darjeeling and England gave him a perfect command of English so that when he wrote his prose and poetry from overhead inspirations, charged with spiritual force and light, he expressed himself through the English language with a mantric power, as the ancients in India expressed themselves through Sanskrit. His writings uplift one. They have been both a means towards and an expression of his inner realisation. If he had not acquired this mastery of English, he could not have expressed himself

in the forceful way he has done, or communicated his experiences directly to the English-speaking world.

Sri Aurobindo's fight for India's independence was also a prelude to the establishment of the Divine's kingdom on earth. When he finally came to Pondicherry he made a direct attempt not only to scale supramental heights but also to bring down the supramental light, knowledge and power into the mental, vital and physical planes and effect their transformation.

He has himself stated: 'I am not doing anything for myself, as I have no personal need of anything, neither of salvation, nor of supramentalisation. If I am seeking after supramentalisation, it is because it is a thing that has to be done for the earth consciousness.'

The Mother also explained in 1930/31: 'The consciousness is like a ladder: in each auspicious epoch there has been one great being capable of adding one more rung to the ladder to enable the ordinary consciousness to reach a higher stage than ever before. It is possible to attain a high level and get completely out of the material consciousness. Then one does not retain the ladder. The great achievement of the great epochs of the universe has been the capacity to add one more rung to the ladder without losing contact with the material, to develop the capacity to reach the highest and at the same time maintain contact with the top and the bottom instead of letting a kind of emptiness cut off all connection between the different planes. To go up and down and join the top to the bottom is the whole secret of realisation and that is the work of an *avatar*. Each time the *avatar* adds one more rung to the ladder, there is a new creation upon earth. The rung which is being added now Sri Aurobindo

has called the Supramental. As a result of it, the consciousness will be able to enter the supramental world and yet retain its personal form, its individualisation, and then come down to establish here a new creation. Certainly this is not the ultimate, for there are higher ranges of being. Now, however, we are at work to bring down the supramental, to effect a reorganisation of the world, to bring the world back to the true divine order. It is essentially a creation of order, a putting of everything in its true place. The chief spirit of force, the *shakti* active at present is Mahasarasvati, the Goddess of perfect organisation.

'The work of achieving a continuity which permits one to go up and down and bring into the material what is above, is done within the consciousness. He who is meant to do it, the *avatar,* even if he were incarcerated in a prison and saw nobody, would still do the work, because it is a work in the consciousness, a work of connection between the supermind and the material being. He does not need to be recognised, he need have no outward power in order to be able to establish this conscious connection. Once, however, the connection is made, it must have its effect in the outer world in the form of a new creation, beginning with a model town and ending with a perfect world.'

Several aims and ideals—political, social and economic — have been laid before humanity and through these, in their highest forms, humanity is vaguely and imperfectly seeking a way of life where each one can realise his highest possibilities, inner and outer. But the ideal of an accelerated further evolution has rarely been placed before mankind. In this further evolution lies the reali-

sation of true happiness, full peace, complete knowledge and divine power — all that humanity has been seeking. It provides too a permanent solution of our present-day problems.

If this book can inspire even a few of its readers towards a Supramental life, it will have served its purpose.

NAVAJATA

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I. EARLY YEARS

Sri Aurobindo was born on August 15, 1872 in Calcutta, at 4.30 a.m., an hour before sunrise, at the house of barrister Mono Mohan Ghose. His father, Dr Krishna Dhan Ghose, was a civil medical officer. His mother, Swarnalata Devi, was the eldest daughter of Rishi Rajnarayan Bose, a well-known exponent of Indian culture. Sri Aurobindo was the third son. His two elder brothers were Benoy Bhusan and Mono Mohan.

Ramakrishna Paramhansa had his *mahasamadhi* on August 15 and this was the day also ordained to be the day of Indian independence. Sri Aurobindo has explained its spiritual significance: 'The 15th August is the day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary; it implies that the physical nature is raised to the divine Nature; the Virgin Mary refers to Nature; Jesus is the divine soul born in man, he is the son of God as well as the son of Man.'

Rajnarayan Bose and his son-in-law Krishna Dhan Ghose held diametrically opposite views where Indian and European cultures were concerned. As early as 1861 Rajnarayan Bose had made a courageous attempt to turn the anglicised Bengali towards their own culture and customs. He encouraged them to speak and write in Bengali, to wear *dhoties* and *chadar* instead of European dress, to adopt Indian games and physical exercises, to promote the Hindu system of medicine, etc. His was an intense love for the motherland, conscious of its great past and sure of a greater future. He also organised a secret society to work for the freedom of

India. Rabindranath Tagore and his brother Jyotindranath Tagore belonged to this society. The members had to take an oath that they would destroy the enemies of the country by the use of force. Dr K. D. Ghose did not subscribe to his father-in-law's views. A man of great ability and strong personality, he had been among the first few to go to Britain for education. He obtained a medical degree at Aberdeen University and returned entirely anglicised in habits, ideas and ideals.

Krishna Dhan was determined that his children should receive an entirely European upbringing. Aurobindo as a child spoke English and Hindustani and learned his mother-tongue only after his return from England. In 1877 Aurobindo and his two elder brothers were sent to Loretto Convent School, run by Irish nuns, at Darjeeling. Very little is known about the two years they spent there in the midst of beautiful Himalayan scenery. Sri Aurobindo remembered the roads with golden ferns and also one or two minor incidents. One was concerned with a long dormitory where the students slept. His brother Mono Mohan's bed was placed near the door. Late one night someone knocked asking for admission, Mono Mohan replied: 'I can't, I am sleeping.' The other incident was a significant dream which he later described in detail: 'I was lying down one day when I saw suddenly a great darkness rushing into me and enveloping me and the whole universe. After that I had a great *tamas* always hanging on to me, all through my stay in England. I believe that darkness had something to do with *tamas* that came upon me. It left me only when I was coming back to India.'

II. IN ENGLAND

At Manchester: 1879 to September 1884 (age: 7-12 years)

In 1879 Dr K. D. Ghose took his three sons to England to be educated. He arranged to leave them in Manchester with the Rev William H. Drewett, a cousin of Mr Glazier the magistrate at Rangpur where Dr Ghose had been living. Sri Aurobindo stayed with the Rev Drewett for a period of five years. William Drewett was Minister of the Congregational Church, Stockport Road—which was also known as the Octagonal Church. He lived at No. 84 Shakespeare Street near the church. Aurobindo's two elder brothers gained admission to the Manchester Grammar School while Aurobindo, who was only seven, was taught at home by the Drewetts. Mr Drewett was an accomplished Latin scholar and he gave Aurobindo a good grounding in English and Latin. Mrs Drewett taught him history, geography, arithmetic and French. As he was studying at home, the young scholar had plenty of time to read books of his own choice. These included the Bible, Shakespeare, Shelley and Keats. He not only read poetry but also wrote verses for the *Fox Family* Magazine even at that early age.

Dr Ghose had given strict instructions that his children should not be allowed to make the acquaintance of any Indian or come in contact with any Indian influence, and these instructions were carried out to the letter. Aurobindo grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, her religion and her culture.

Barin, Sri Aurobindo's youngest brother, was born in

England in Croydon, on January 5, 1880.

A false rumour was current at one time that Aurobindo had been converted to Christianity. This may have been due to a certain incident which he himself has described: 'There was once a meeting of non-conformist ministers at Cumberland when we were in England. The old lady in whose house we lived—Mrs Drewett, Mr Drewett's mother—took me there. After prayers were over nearly everyone dispersed but devout people remained a little longer and it was at that time that conversions were made. I was feeling completely bored. Then a minister approached me and asked me some questions. I did not give any reply. Then they all shouted 'He is saved, he is saved,' and began to pray for me and offer thanks to God. I did not know what it was all about. Then the minister came to me and asked me to pray. I was not in the habit of offering prayer. But somehow I did it in the manner in which children recite their prayers before going to bed in order to keep up an appearance. That was the only thing that happened. I did not attend the church regularly. I was about ten at that time.'

Aurobindo's name was registered at St Paul's and at Cambridge as Aravinda Ackroyd Ghose. In India, before he went to England, a Miss Annette Ackroyd arrived in Calcutta in December 1872, the year in which Aurobindo was born. She was a friend of Mono Mohan Ghose and was present at the ceremony of naming the child. Sri Aurobindo's father, being very fond of the English way of life and wanting the child to have an English name, gave him Miss Ackroyd's surname. Sri Aurobindo later dropped the name 'Ackroyd'.

At the age of seven, Sri Aurobindo had already the strong impression that a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary change was coming to the world and that he himself was destined to play a part in it.

September 1884 to July 1890 (age 12-18 years)

In September 1884, Aurobindo and his brother Mono Mohan were admitted to St Paul's School and went to London. Aurobindo was examined by Dr Walker, the Headmaster, who was so satisfied with his proficiency in Latin and other subjects that he took a personal interest in him and himself taught Greek to Aurobindo during his five years at St Paul's. He studied the Classics and was awarded the Butterworth Second Prize in Literature and the Bedford Prize in History. His promotion to higher forms was rapid, for the Headmaster wanted to give his young pupil full scope for development. Aurobindo took an active part in the Literary Society at St Paul's. In 1889, on November 5, he participated with distinction in a debate on the inconsistency of 'Swift's Political Views' and on November 19 in a debate on Milton. St Paul's was a day-school. Here, during the previous three years, his studies occupied very little of his time for he was already proficient in them and did not think it necessary to labour over them any longer. Most of his time was spent in general reading, especially English poetry, literature and fiction, French literature and the history of ancient, mediaeval and modern Europe. He also devoted some time to the study of Italian, German and a little Spanish. He spent much time in writing poetry too and his *Hecuba* seems to have

been admired by Laurence Binyon.

The three brothers lived in London for some time with Mr Drewett's mother but she left them after a quarrel with Mono Mohan about religion. Old Mrs Drewett was fervently evangelical and she said that she would not live with an atheist as the house might fall down on her. Later Benoy Bhusan and Aurobindo occupied a room in the South Kensington Liberal Club where Mr J. S. Cotton, brother of Sir Henry Cotton, for some time Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, was the secretary and Benoy assisted him in his work. Mono Mohan went into lodgings. Subsequently Aurobindo also followed suit until he took up residence at Cambridge.

During his school life in London, Sri Aurobindo had to pass through great hardships on account of his father's failure to be regular in his remittances. For a whole year a slice or two of bread-and-butter and a cup of tea in the morning and in the evening a penny bread-roll constituted his only food for the day.

Against this background of grave financial difficulties, Sri Aurobindo recalls the kind-heartedness of two landladies with whom he and his brothers stayed: 'Our landlady was an angel. She came from Somerset and settled in London, perhaps after she was widowed. She was long-suffering and never asked for months and months if we did not pay her. I wonder how she managed. We had two such landladies. The other was also nice to us. I paid her from my I.C.S. stipend.'

October 1890 to October 1892 (age: 18-20 years)

In October 1890 Aurobindo went to King's College,

Cambridge, from St Paul's School, London, with a senior classical scholarship of £80 per annum. He passed the Classical Tripos examination in the first division with distinction and won all the prizes in one year for Greek and Latin verses. He did not graduate at Cambridge. He passed high in the first part of the Tripos (First Class). It is on passing this first part that the degree of B.A. is usually given, but only if the examination is taken in the third year. Aurobindo had only two years at his disposal and passed in his second year. In such cases one has to appear for the second part of the Tripos in the fourth year to qualify for the degree. Another way to obtain the degree was to make an application for it, but he did not want to do that. A degree in English is valuable only if one wants to take up an academic career.

The famous 'O.B.' (Oscar Browning) had examined Aurobindo's classical papers at the scholarship examination. These papers also contained an essay comparing Shakespeare and Milton. One day Aurobindo met Oscar Browning at coffee at the rooms of a King's College don. The great 'O.B.', passing on from the subject of cotillions to scholarship said to him: 'I suppose you know you passed extraordinarily high in the examination? I have examined papers at thirteen examinations and I have never during that time seen such excellent papers as yours. As for your essay, it was wonderful.' Then, probably out of curiosity, he asked Aurobindo where his rooms were and when told, 'O.B.' was shocked and remarked: 'That wretched hole?'

Aurobindo's father was an extremely popular man. While serving at Rangpur, it was always 'the doctor' who

got things done. Mr Glazier, the English magistrate at Rangpur, was his close friend, but he was transferred and another Englishman was posted in his place. This man did not like the influence Dr Ghose wielded, so he asked the Government to transfer him. The Government accepted his advice and the doctor was posted at Khulna. Here also Dr Ghose was extremely popular but the circumstances of the transfer were a shock to him. He lost faith in the English sense of justice and came to resent English domination. Until now everything Western had appeared good to him. It was in fact his great ambition that his sons should be successful. At that time to be accepted into the Indian Civil Service was considered the acme of success.

In 1890 Aurobindo passed the Open Competition for the Indian Civil Service and he also passed the two periodical examinations as well as the medical examination. He did not feel attracted to the I.C.S. but he knew his family would not allow him to reject any opportunity of securing an appointment. Now to enter the I.C.S. it was obligatory to pass a riding test. Aurobindo managed to get himself disqualified by the simple expedient of not appearing for it. It may be remarked here that there were cases in which candidates who had not passed the riding test were nominated to the I.C. S. in India and they passed their riding examination during their term of service. To his satisfaction, however, he was rejected. The Civil Service Commission commented: 'Although several appointments have been offered to Mr A. A. Ghose, of attending for examination in riding, he has repeatedly failed to attend at the time appointed, so they are unable to certify that he is qualified to be appointed to the Civil

Service of India.' Another side to the rejection of Aurobindo from the I.C.S. is contained in a note on his personal file made by Lord Kimberley, who at tnat time was Secretary of State for India and who apparently was aware of Aurobindo's nationalistic views. The note read: 'I should much doubt whether Mr Ghose would be a desirable addition to the Service.' As Aurobindo was not interested either, both sides were happy!

Dr Ghose had written to his sons in England bitterly complaining of the heartless attitude of the British Government in India. From time to time he sent them clippings from the Indian newspapers. These news items raised in Aurobindo a feeling of resentment against the subjection of India to foreign rule. But his decision to take part in some action directed towards the liberation of the country took shape only after some years. At Cambridge as a member of the Indian Majlis of which towards the latter part of his stay he became Secretary, Aurobindo delivered many revolutionary speeches. These had the effect of influencing the authorities to exclude him from the Indian Civil Service.

He and his brother Benoy formed a part of a small revolutionary group of Indians in London who rebelled habitually against the leadership of Dadabhai Naoroji, a Moderate leader in Indian politics. During the last days of his stay in England, Aurobindo attended a private meeting of Indians in London at which a secret society was formed with the romantic name of 'Lotus and Dagger'. Its members vowed that each would adopt some action to overthrow foreign rule in his homeland. Although the society was short-lived, some of its members kept the oath they had taken. Among them was Aurobindo.

At the time that Aurobindo was disqualified from the I.C.S., the Gaekwar of Baroda was in London. Aurobindo was introduced to him by Sir Henry Cotton's brother and as a result of this introduction he obtained an appointment in the service of the Gaekwar. He left England in January 1893 to return to India to take up this appointment.

Thus Aurobindo passed the most impressionable years of his life under Western influence, in the Convent School at Darjeeling and in England. At the age of twenty-one he returned to his homeland destined to organise the fight for India's Independence and to make his countrymen conscious of their culture and the role of India in the world.

One would normally assume that after a stay of fourteen years in England, Aurobindo would develop an attachment to English culture and life. His own comment in this connection was: 'If there was attachment to a European land as a second country, it was intellectually and emotionally to one not seen or lived in this life, not England, but France.'

In India Dr K. D. Ghose was eagerly looking forward to his sons' return but he did not live to see it. He was informed erroneously that the steamer in which Aurobindo had sailed from England had sunk off the coast of Portugal. When Dr Ghose received this news, he concluded that his son had been drowned. The shock proved too much for the fond father—it caused a fatal heart attack. The news of the ship which sank was correct but Aurobindo was not on it, he had in fact left England by the mail steamer s.s. *Carthage* which, although it encountered a violent storm *en route*, reached India

safely and docked in Bombay early in February 1893.

As Aurobindo set foot on Indian soil at Apollo Bunder, Bombay, Mother India greeted him in a memorable way. He has written that a vast calm descended upon him and surrounded him and stayed with him for months afterwards. This is what he wrote to one of his disciples: 'Since I set foot on Indian soil on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, I began to have spiritual experiences, but these were not divorced from this world but had an inner and infinite bearing on it, such as a feeling of the Infinite pervading material space and the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies. At the same time I found myself entering supraphysical world planes with influences and an effect from them upon the material plane.'

III. BARODA

Sri Aurobindo joined Baroda State service on February 8, 1893. Technically he continued in Baroda State service till June 18, 1907, but from February to April 1906 and again from June 12, 1906 to July 12, 1907, he was on leave, busy with his political work.

He began his work in the Survey Settlement Department at a salary of Rs. 200 per month. Later he was posted to the Stamp and Revenue Department. He also worked for some time in the Baroda State Secretariat.

The Maharaja used to make use of him for his personal work, for drafting important letters or making digests of correspondence and documents or even to draft agreements. He was not personal secretary to the Maharaja, however, except once when he briefly accompanied him to Kashmir. At one time Sri Aurobindo was specially sent to Ooty in order to prepare a precis of the Bapat case and of the judicial opinion on it.

The famous historian, G. S. Sardesai, narrates some incidents in his book *Sayaji Rao Gaekwad Yanchya Sahavasat* which refer to Sri Aurobindo.

'Sri Aurobindo and myself were together with Sayaji Rao very often...Sometimes men like Sri Aurobindo would pen out lectures for him...Once the Maharaja had to address a social conference and Sri Aurobindo prepared the speech. We three (i.e., the Maharaja, Sardesai and Sri Aurobindo) set together and read it. The Maharaja after hearing it said: "Can you not, Arabind Babu, tone it down? It is too fine to be mine." Sri Aurobindo replied smilingly: "Why make a change

for nothing? Do you think, Maharaja, that if it is toned down a little, people will believe it to be yours? Good or bad, whatever it be, people will always say that the Maharaja always gets his lectures written by others. The main thing is whether the thoughts are yours. That is your chief part."' Sardesai also states that Sri Aurobindo carried on the major part of the correspondence that passed between the Indian Government and Baroda State concerning Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, and the Maharaja. It appears that the Maharaja was informed by the Government when he was in Paris that Lord Curzon was expected to visit Baroda and he was asked to return. He failed to do so and Lord Curzon felt insulted. Sardesai also writes: 'I used to go out for a walk with Sri Aurobindo in those days. His usual nature was reserved, non-communicative. To a question he would reply "Yes" or "No" and not go beyond—there was something of the mystic in him.'

Sri Aurobindo was not over-interested in administration. The Maharaja, while appreciating his capacity for quick and successful work, suggested that he might be more regular and diligent.

In 1900 he was transferred to the Baroda College as Professor of English and in 1901 he married Mrinalini, daughter of Sri Bhupalchandra Basu.

Sri Aurobindo was asked to teach French at the Baroda College on a part-time basis. In 1903 he took one month's leave to further his political work. To make up for loss of lessons due to this, he gave the students extra French classes at his house before his departure. In 1904 he was appointed Vice-Principal of the College.

About his career as a professor, Sri Aurobindo in the

course of a talk said : 'I was not so conscientious a professor as Mono Mohan. I never used to look at the notes and sometimes my explanations did not agree with them at all. I was Professor of English and sometimes of French. What was surprising to me was that students used to take down everything verbatim and mug it up by heart. Such a thing would never have happened in England. At Baroda, the students besides taking my notes used to get notes of some professor from Bombay, especially if any of them was to be an examiner. Once I was giving a lecture on Southey's *Life of Nelson*. My lecture was not in agreement with the notes. So the students remarked that it was not at all like what was found in the notes. I replied : "I have not read the notes—in any case they are all rubbish."' All the same his students held him in very high esteem. Sri K. M. Munshi, one of his students, recounts : 'My own contact with Sri Aurobindo dated back to 1902, when after passing the matriculation examination, I joined the Baroda College. Though previously I had only on occasion the privilege of being in personal contact with him, the Aurobindonian legend in the College filled me with reverence and it was with awe that I hung upon his words whenever he came to college as Professor of English.'

In Baroda Sri Aurobindo applied himself to the learning of Sanskrit, Marathi, Gujarati and Bengali. He was soon able to understand and appreciate the poetry of Madhusudan and Bankimchandra in the original Bengali. He studied the *Upanishads*, the *Gita* and the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the works of Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti and others. All this was happening 'by natural attraction to Indian culture and way of life and temperamental

feeling and preference for all that was Indian'. Even in his sojourns at Baidyanath, where he used to go and spend some time with his relatives, his trunks used to be full of books. His cousin, Basanti Devi, has thus recorded his visits: 'Auro Dada used to arrive with two or three trunks and we always thought they must contain costly suits and other articles of luxury like scents, etc. When he opened them, I would look into them and wonder. What was this? A few ordinary clothes and all the rest books and nothing but books. Does Auro Dada like to read all these? We all want to chat and enjoy ourselves in vacations; does he want to spend even this time in reading these books? But because he liked reading, he brought the books with him. It was not that he did not join us in our talks and chats and merry-making. His talk used to be full of wit and humour.'

He was a voracious reader and would pore over books covering a wide range of interests as quickly as he got them. He had given a standing order to two bookshops in Bombay to mail him catalogues of all the latest titles. Books would often come to him in crates, much to the amazement of his friends. He used to set apart a portion of his salary every month for meeting the cost of these books. Sitting by a kerosene lamp he would read late into the night, unmindful of the swarming mosquitoes and often quite unaware of the waiting food on the table. In the morning after breakfast, he would again busy himself in reading or writing until it was time for his bath, food and work. His long period in England did not stand in the way of his basic attitude to life which became more and more apparent, whether it pertained to food, dress or other things. He was simple in every-

thing—often to the point of being uncomfortable. He was quite at home under a leaky roof or upon a creaking iron cot with no mattress on it. His reading was catholic: he read Homer, Dante and Horace as avidly as he read the Sanskrit poets.

In 1895 a collection of Sri Aurobindo's poems was published under the title *Songs to Myrtille and Other Poems*. Some of these compositions show the influence of European culture and environment, while others in the same book describe his first reactions to India and Indian culture. Two compositions of some length—*Urvasie* and *Love and Death*—were written in Baroda. Sri Aurobindo's early vision of his great epic, *Savitri*, dates from this period.

In 1899 a young Bengali litterateur, Dinendra Kumar Roy, helped Sri Aurobindo to perfect his knowledge of the Bengali language and develop facility in conversation. In return Dinendra Kumar tried to learn German and French from Sri Aurobindo. They remained together for about two years. A glowing pen-picture of Sri Aurobindo's life in Baroda has been left by Dinendra Kumar in his book *Sri Aurobindo Prasange*: 'I lived with him day and night and the more I came to be acquainted with his heart, the more I realised that he was not of this earth —he was a god fallen by some curse from his heavenly abode.'

The word *swaraj* (self-government) was the slogan and goal of the Indian nationalist movement. This word, also used by Sri Aurobindo, has a spiritual as well as a political significance. The word was used for the first time in its political sense of complete national freedom by an able Maratha writer, Deuskar, long domiciled in Bengal, in his book *Dasher Katha* written in Bengali.

In this book he gave vivid details of the British and their industrial exploitation of India that had impoverished the country and its people. This book had an immense repercussion in Bengal; it captured the mind of young Bengal and assisted more than anything else in the preparation of the *swadeshi* movement. The Government as usual was alarmed and banned the book. It may be mentioned here that the word *swaraj* occurs in ancient scriptures in its spiritual sense. Sri Aurobindo advocated *swaraj* both in its political and spiritual senses. On March 2, 1908 he wrote in the *Bande Mataram*: 'India is the Guru of the nations, the physician of the human soul in its profounder maladies; she is destined once more to new-mould the life of the world and restore the peace of the human spirit. But *swaraj* is the necessary condition of her work and before she can do the work, she must fulfil the condition.'

There were three aspects to Sri Aurobindo's political ideas and activities:

(a) The action with which he started; secret revolutionary propaganda and organisation of which the central object was preparation of an armed insurrection.

(b) Public propaganda intended to convert the whole nation to the ideal of independence which was regarded, when he entered politics, by the vast majority of Indians as impractical and impossible, an almost insane chimera. It was thought that the British Empire was too powerful and India too weak, effectively disarmed and impotent even to dream of the success of such an endeavour.

(c) The organisation of the people to carry on a public and united opposition, to undermine foreign rule through inreasing non-cooperation and passive resistance. Even

after Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry, the movement for India's freedom developed along the lines laid down by him until *swaraj* was realised.

In August 1893, six months after his return from England, Sri Aurobindo contributed a series of articles to a Poona weekly, the *Indu Prakash*. The series was titled *New Lamps for Old*. This was his first public expression of his views on the nationalist movement. The editor of the paper, K. G. Deshpande, introduced the 21-year-old Sri Aurobindo as follows:

'We promised our readers some time back a series on our present political progress by an extremely able and keen observer of the present times. We are very much pleased to give our readers the first instalment of that series. The title under which these views appear is *New Lamps for Old*, which is a suggestive, though a metaphorical one. The preface will take us over to the next issue. The views therein contained are not those that are commonly held by our politicians, and for this reason they are very important. We have been convinced that our efforts in political progress are not sustained but are lacking in vigour. Hypocrisy has been the besetting sin of our political agitation. Oblique vision is the fashion. True, matter-of-fact, honest criticism is very badly needed. Our institutions have no strong foundation and are hourly in danger of falling down. Under these circumstances, it was idle, nay criminal. . . to remain silent while our whole energy in political progress was spent in a wrong direction. The questions at issue are momentous. It is the making or unmaking of the nation. We have, therefore, secured a gentleman of great literary talents, of liberal culture and of considerable experience,

well versed in the art of writing, at great personal inconvenience and probable misrepresentation, to give out his views in no uncertain voice and, we may be allowed to add, in a style and diction peculiarly his own. We beseech our readers' most careful and constant perusal on his behalf and assure them that they will find in these articles matter that will set them thinking and stir their patriotic souls.'

This series of articles started on August 9, 1893. It shocked and stirred the country. The publication continued until February 1894. Here are a few extracts:

'I say of the Congress this—that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in which it proceeds towards their accomplishment is not a spirit of sincerity and whole-heartedness, and that the methods it has chosen are not the right methods, and the leaders in whom it trusts not the right sort of men to be leaders—in brief, we are at present the blind led, if not by the blind, at any rate by the one-eyed.'

'For, by reflection, or instinct to get a clear insight into our position and by dexterity to make the most of it, that is the whole secret of politics, and that is just what we have failed to do.'

'We lose in sincerity which is another name for strength.'

'So long as this temper prevails, we shall never realise how utterly it is beyond the power of even an excellent machine to renovate an effete and impoverished national character and how palpably requisite to commence from within and not depend on any exterior agency.'

'The proletariat among us is sunk in ignorance . . . with that proletariat resides, whether we like it or not, our sole assurance of hope, our sole chance in the future.'

This publication created a furore in political circles. Mahadev Govind Ranade, a famous Maharashtra leader, who was connected with the paper, warned Deshpande that he might be prosecuted for sedition. Deshpande was in an awkward position and requested Sri Aurobindo to tone down his criticism a little or write something less violent. After such a request, Sri Aurobindo lost all enthusiasm for writing the series. Instead he began to write on the philosophy of politics leaving aside the practical aspect. But he soon got disgusted with it.

Sri Aurobindo studied the conditions of the country so that he might be able to judge more maturely what could be done. He made his first move in 1898-99. Through his personal effort he had had admitted to the Baroda State Army a Bengali youth, Jatindranath Bannerjee, later known as Niralamb Swamy. Jatin returned to Bengal with a programme of action for the liberation of India. Societies of young men were to be established with various ostensible objects, cultural, intellectual or moral, and those already existing were to be won over for revolutionary purpose. Young men were to be trained in activities which might be helpful for ultimate military action. The plan gained rapid acceptance.

Meanwhile Sri Aurobindo had met a member of the secret society formed to organise a revolution for bringing about the independence of India and taken the oath of the society. He was introduced to its council in Bombay.

Barin came to Baroda in 1901 and this gave Sri Auro-

bindo an opportunity to prepare him for the revolutionary work. Barin also joined the secret society. With sword in one hand and the *Gita* in the other, he took the oath: 'As long as there is life in me and as long as India is not liberated from her chains of subjection, I will carry on the work of revolution. If at any time I disclose a single word or a single event of the society or harm it in any way, it shall be at the cost of my own life.'

To Sri Aurobindo the freedom of India was not a game of politics but was the first step for establishing God's kingdom on earth. Though Baroda was his headquarters, his political activities covered the whole of India, particularly Bengal, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

In 1902 Sri Aurobindo went to Bengal to speak of the secret society and its aims to P. Mitter and others — the leading men of the revolutionary group — and they took the oath of the society. It may be noted that the secret society did not include terrorism in its programme, but this element grew up in Bengal as a result of the strong repression and reaction to this repression in that province. In this same year Sri Aurobindo attended the Congress session at Ahmedabad. Tilak, who was also present at this session, took him out of the *pandal* and talked to him for an hour, expressing his contempt for the Reformist Movement and explaining his own line of action in Maharashtra.

In 1903 Sri Aurobindo wrote a booklet entitled *No Compromise* which was printed in secret by Abinash, a member of the revolutionary party.

In 1904 he attended the Congress session at Bombay at which Sir Henry Cotton presided. Sir Henry advocated a 'United States of India' but as a colony of the

British Empire. Sri Aurobindo's stand, consistently, was for complete freedom. During this year Sri Aurobindo met Charu Chandra Dutt, I.C.S. and explained to him the *Bhavani Mandir Manifesto*. This Manifesto was written by Sri Aurobindo, and can be called the 'bible' of the Nationalist movement. Dutt joined the revolutionary party. Another member of the I.C.S. who was an ardent supporter of Sri Aurobindo and his revolutionary work in western India was G. D. Madgaonkar. Here are some extracts from the Manifesto:

'The deeper we look, the more we shall be convinced that the one thing wanting, which we must strive to acquire before all others, is strength—strength physical, strength mental, strength moral, but above all strength spiritual, which is the one inexhaustible and imperishable source of all the others. If we have strength, everything else will be added to us easily and naturally. In the absence of strength, we are like men in a dream who have hands but cannot seize or strike, who have feet but cannot run.'

'There is no instance in history of a more marvellous and sudden upsurging of strength in a nation than modern Japan. All sorts of theories had been started to account for the uprising, but now intellectual Japanese are telling us what were the fountains of that mighty awakening, the sources of that inexhaustible strength. They were drawn from religion. It was the Vedantic teachings of Dyomi and the recovery of Shintoism with its worship of the national *shakti* of Japan in the image and person of the Mikado that enabled the little island empire to

wield the stupendous weapons of Western knowledge and science as lightly and invincibly as Arjun wielded the *Gandiv*.'

The appendix to *Bhavani Mandir* mentioned in detail the work to be done and the rules to be followed.

In 1905 Sri Aurobindo attended the Congress session at Benares, where Gopal Krishna Gokhale presided. He did not attend the open session but the leaders of the nationalist movement came to him, discussed the plans and acted accordingly.

On October 16, 1905 came the partition of Bengal despite all protests and it aroused great resentment in the country. The skies were rent with shouts of *Bande Mataram*... The Government promptly banned its utterance. But the effect was contrary to what they expected. It became the *mantra* of the nation.

Bande Mataram is the theme of a song which recurs in *Anandmath*, a novel written by Bankim and published in 1882. In this book the rebel *sannyasins* chant this inspiring song — 'Hail to our Mother' (*Bande Mataram*) — in their fight against Mussalman tyrants and British traders. This song of *Anandmath* is now one of the two national anthems of independent India.

Although Sri Aurobindo directly and actively engaged himself in the struggle for national freedom, he acted as from behind a curtain because he had not resigned from Baroda State service.

IV. BENGAL

The partition of Bengal in 1905 created a situation which Sri Aurobindo considered a blessing. He directly and actively engaged himself in the struggle for national freedom.

On April 14, 1906 Sri Aurobindo attended the Barisal Conference. This conference was declared illegal by the Government. There was a procession to protest against that declaration which was led by Sri Aurobindo, Bipin Pal and B. C. Chatterji. The procession was lathi-charged and several persons were injured. After this he accompanied Bipin Pal on a tour of Bengal during which enormous meetings were held and, in one district, in spite of the prohibition of the district magistrate.

In March 1906 at the suggestion of Barin, a weekly Bengali paper was started called *Jugantar* (Change of Age). Sri Aurobindo himself wrote some of the opening articles and exercised a general control over it. *Jugantar* preached open revolt and even published instructions on guerilla warfare. When one of the sub-editors (a brother of Swami Vivekananda) was prosecuted, *Jugantar* refused to defend itself in a British court on the ground that it did not recognise the British Government.

The nationalist programme followed by the country until it achieved its independence was initiated for the first time during this period. Sri Aurobindo was the first politician to stand openly for complete and absolute independence—*Purna Swaraj*—as the aim of political action in India. He also wrote several articles strongly advocating the use of *swadeshi* goods, boycott of foreign

goods, passive resistance, non-cooperation, national education, settlement of disputes in law by popular arbitration and other matters. The country followed this programme strictly and with vigour.

In August 1906 Sri Aurobindo joined the National College at Calcutta (now Jadavpur University) as its first Principal on a nominal salary of Rs. 150 per month. The college was sponsored by Jatiya Shiksha Parishad.

On August 6, 1906 Bipin Pal, one of the nationalist leaders, started a newspaper called *Bande Mataram*. He asked Sri Aurobindo's help in editing the paper. Sri Aurobindo not only consented to do so, but also called a private meeting of nationalist leaders in Calcutta, who accepted the *Bande Mataram* as their party paper. Sri Aurobindo later acted as the editor of the paper, but his name did not appear as such. The paper continued for about two years. The Government stopped its publication while Sri Aurobindo was in jail. The paper was in financial difficulties and the editors wanted it to end with some *eclat* and in all honour. So they deliberately wrote an article to provoke the Government to take legal action.

During this period Sri Aurobindo and his colleagues attended the Congress session at Calcutta presided over by Dadabhai Naoroji. For the first time in the history of the Congress a resolution was passed demanding *swaraj*. The Nationalists made it clear that *swaraj* meant complete independence so that an Indian would be as free from foreign control as an Englishman was in England or an American in America. But the Moderates interpreted it as 'colonial self-government'.

On July 24, 1907 a prosecution was launched against Sri Aurobindo and Bipin Pal on the excuse that they had

published a seditious article, or letter, from a reader. It seemed sure that the sentence would be passed and Rabindranath Tagore wrote his famous poem *Homage to Sri Aurobindo*. But Bipin Pal, when asked by the court to name the editor, refused to divulge it. For this contempt of court, he was sentenced to jail for six months. However, because of Bipin Pal not disclosing the name it could not be proved that Sri Aurobindo was the editor and hence Sri Aurobindo was acquitted.

In November 1907 Sri Aurobindo led the Nationalist party at the Midnapur session of the Bengal Provincial Conference and later its Hooghly session. His stress throughout was on complete independence; it was a part of an integrated world outlook. He felt India had a mission to perform in the comity of nations and wrote: 'A divine power is behind the movement. The *Zeit-Geist*, the Time-Spirit, is at work to bring about a mighty movement of which the world at the present juncture has need. That movement is the resurgence of Asia and the resurgence of India is not only a necessary part of the larger movement but its central need. India is the key-stone of the arch, the chief inheritress of the common Asiatic destiny... The idea of a free and united India has been born and arrived at full stature in the land of the *rishis*, and the spiritual force of a great civilisation of which the world has need, is gathering at its back.' This was his vision; he never had any hatred against England or the English people.

On December 26, 1907 Sri Aurobindo attended the famous Surat Congress. The gulf between the Nationalists and the Moderates had widened. The rift centred on the resolution passed by the Congress at its Calcutta

session. The Nationalists wanted to take that as a basis and proceed in its implementation. The Moderates did not accept the resolution of 1906 as binding. They had a majority in the Reception Committee, so the Nationalists proposed to bring it before the open session. The trouble started over the election of the president. Surendranath proposed Dr. Ras Bihari Ghose; Tilak stood for Lajpat Rai. The Moderate party volunteers became enraged and picked up a chair to beat Tilak; the Nationalists hurled a shoe on the dais and then marched on to it; pandemonium reigned and the Moderates called in the police to restore order.

Sri Aurobindo once mentioned in a private letter: 'Very few people know that it was I (without consulting Tilak) who gave the order that led to the breaking up of the Congress.'

V. THE ALIPUR TRIAL

Sri Aurobindo had a family property in north Calcutta called Maniktala Garden and there Barin had set up a centre for the revolutionaries. There they studied revolutionary literature and the *Gita*, practised meditation and carried out experiments in the making of bombs. It may be noted that Sri Aurobindo's idea was not terrorism, as it later became, but an open armed revolution in the whole of India.

The Government was very much alarmed by the Nationalist demand for complete independence and tried to intimidate the revolutionaries through brutal punishment. One of the presidency magistrates of Calcutta, Mr Kingsford, ordered a 15-year-old boy, Sushil Sen, to be flogged in his presence. As a result of this Sushil became unconscious and was half-dead. The revolutionaries took this affront as a challenge and Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki decided to retaliate. Kingsford sensed trouble and had himself transferred to Muzaffarpur. The two youths followed him and on April 30, 1908 Khudiram threw a bomb at a carriage as it was coming out of a club, thinking mistakenly that Kingsford was in it. Two innocent ladies, a Mrs Kennedy and her daughter who were riding in the carriage, were killed. On receiving the news, Sri Aurobindo advised Barin to remove the workers and materials from Maniktala Garden. Barin carried out the directions but not completely and he and others suffered the consequences of his mistake. At midnight on May 2, 1908 a police party raided the Garden and unearthed bombs and weapons. Barin and

those with him were arrested.

The Government thus had their long sought-for opportunity to pounce on Sri Aurobindo, though he had nothing to do with the incidents of Kingsford and the Kennedys. Early on the morning of May 3, 1908 the police raided his house in Grey Street and arrested him. The house was thoroughly searched and his personal writings, letters, etc., were carried away.

Sri Aurobindo was taken to the police station at Lal Bazar and from there to Alipur Jail. His prison life as an under-trial prisoner began on May 5, 1908. He was released from prison the following year on May 6.

Thus began the great Alipur Trial. The accused numbered in all 49 and the witnesses 206; 400 documents were filed and 5,000 exhibits, consisting of bombs, revolvers, ammunition, detonators, fuses, poisonous acids, etc., were produced. One of the accused, Nardendra Goswamy who turned approver, was shot by Kanailal Dutt and Satyendra Bose. For this Kanailal paid with his life and was hanged in the jail.

The additional Sessions Judge who tried Sri Aurobindo and the others was a civilian by name C. B. Beechcroft. He was a contemporary of Sri Aurobindo at King's College, Cambridge. They were both outstanding scholars and in the final examination Aurobindo, the prisoner, had beaten Beechcroft, the Judge, in Greek. The accused were placed behind a network of wire and police with fixed bayonets stood on guard throughout the room. The Chief Prosecutor, Eardley Norton, had a five-chambered loaded revolver lying on his brief-case throughout the trial. All efforts were made to get Sri Aurobindo convicted. Beechcroft wrote in the preliminary portion of his judg-

ment: 'I now come to the case of Arabind Ghose, the most important accused in the case. He is the accused whom, more than any other, the prosecution is anxious to have convicted and, but for his presence in the dock, there is no doubt that the case would have finished ago.'

Chittaranjan Das who defended Sri Aurobindo read from Sri Aurobindo's statement:

'The whole of my case before you is this. If it is suggested that I preached the ideal of freedom to my country which is against the law, I plead guilty to the charge. If it is an offence to preach the ideal of freedom, I admit having done it. I have never disputed it. I have adopted the principles of the political philosophy of the West and I have assimilated that to the immortal teachings of Vedantism.

'I felt I was called upon to preach to my country to make them realise that India had a mission to perform in the comity of nations.

"If that is my fault you can chain me, imprison me, but you will never get out of me a denial of that charge. I venture to submit that under no section of the law do I come for preaching the ideal of freedom, and with regard to the deeds with which I have been charged, I submit there is no evidence on the record and it is absolutely inconsistent with everything that I taught, that I wrote and with every tendency of my mind discovered in the evidence.'

Das then addressed the court as follows:

'My appeal to you, therefore, is that a man like this

who is being charged with the offences imputed to him stands not only before the bar of this court but stands before the bar of the High Court of History and my appeal to you is that long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands. Therefore I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this court but before the bar of the High Court of History.

'The time has come for you, Sir, to consider your judgment and for you, gentlemen, to consider your verdict. I appeal to you, Sir, in the name of all the traditions of the English Bench that forms the most glorious chapter of English history. I appeal to you in the name of all that is noble, of all the thousand principles of law which have emanated from the English Bench, and I appeal to you in the name of distinguished judges who have administered the Law in such a manner as to compel not only obedience, but the respect of all those in whose cases they had administered the Law. I appeal to you in the name of the glorious chapter of English history and let it not be said that an English judge forgets to vindicate justice.'

Then turning to the Indian jury, Das addressed them in these words:

'To you, gentlemen, I appeal in the name of the very

ideal that Arabinda preached and in the name of all the traditions of our country; and let it not be said that two of his own countrymen were overcome by passions and prejudices and yielded to the clamour of the moment.'

Finally came the court judgment: 'I find Naren Bakshi, Sailendra Kumar Sen, Nalini Kanta Gupta, Purna Chandra Sen, Bijoy Kumar Nag, Kunja Lall Shaba, Hemendra Nath Ghose, Dharini Nath Gupta, Birendra Nath Ghose, Bijoy Bhattacharji, Hem Chandra Sen, Probhash Chandra De, Dindoyal Bose, Nikhileswar Roy Maulik, Deba Brata Bose, Arabinda Ghose, not guilty under sections 121, 121A and 122 and all accused persons not guilty under section 123.' C. B. Beechcroft.

Although Sri Aurobindo and those few mentioned were acquitted, others were convicted. Barin and Ullaskar were sentenced to death but the sentences were later commuted to life imprisonment. Nevertheless they were released in 1920.

VI. THE YOGA

A NEW CHAPTER opens in Sri Aurobindo's mission on earth after his acquittal in the Alipur Trial. He was inwardly told that the liberation of India was sure, that the goal and the means were already laid before the country and that he must prepare for the next step — the liberation of the whole human race. While in jail the voice within him said: 'I have another thing for you to do, and it is for that I have brought you here, to teach you what you could not learn yourself and to train you for my work.'

The first speech he made on his release from jail was at Uttarpara, wherein he said: 'I say no longer that Nationalism is a creed, a religion, a faith; I say that it is the *Sanatana Dharma* which for us is nationalism; the Hindu nation was born with the *Sanatana Dharma*, with it it moves, and with it it grows. When the *Sanatana Dharma* declines, then the nation declines and if the *Sanatana Dharma* was capable of perishing with the *Sanatana Dharma* it would perish. The *Sanatana Dharma*, that is nationalism. This is the message I have to speak to you.' He also wrote in the *Karma Yogin* in June 1909:

'Yoga is communion with God for knowledge, for love or for work. The Yogin puts himself into direct relation with that which is omniscient and omnipotent within man and without him. He is in tune with the infinite, he becomes a channel for the strength of God to pour Himself out upon the world whether through calm benevolence or active beneficence. When a man rises by putting (away) from him the slough of self and lives for

others and in the joys and sorrows of others; when he works perfectly and with love and zeal, but casts away the anxiety for results and is neither eager for victory nor afraid of defeat; when he devotes all his works to God and lays every thought, word and deed as an offering on the divine altar, when he gets rid of fear and hatred, repulsion and disgust and attachment, and works like the forces of Nature, unhasting, unresting, inevitably, perfectly; when he rises above the thought that he is the body or the heart or the mind or the sum of these and finds his own true self; when he becomes aware of his immortality and the unreality of death; when he experiences the advent of knowledge and feels himself passive and the divine force working unresisted through his mind, his speech, his senses and all his organs; when having thus abandoned whatever he is, does or has, to the Lord of all, the Lover and Helper of mankind, he dwells permanently in Him and becomes incapable of grief, disquiet or false excitement — that is Yoga. *Pranayama* and *asana*, concentration, worship, ceremonies, religious practice are not themselves Yoga but only a means towards Yoga. Nor is Yoga a difficult or dangerous path, it is safe and easy to all who take refuge with the Inner Guide and Teacher. All men are potentially capable of it, for there is no man who has not strength or faith or love developed or latent in his nature and any one of these is a sufficient staff for the Yogin. All cannot, indeed, reach in a single life the highest in this path, but all can go forward; and in proportion as a man advances he gets peace, strength and joy. And even a little of this *dharma* delivers man or nation out of great fear. It is an error, we repeat, to think that spirituality is a thing

divorced from life. 'Abandon all' says the *Isha Upanishad*, 'that thou mayest enjoy all, neither covet any man's possession. But verily do thy deeds in this world and wish to live thy hundred years; no other way is given thee than this to escape the bondage of thy acts.' It is an error to think that the heights of religion are above the struggles of this world. The recurrent cry of Sri Krishna to Arjuna insists on the struggle: 'Fight and overthrow thy opponents, remember me and fight; give up all thy works to me with a heart full of spirituality, and free from craving, free from selfish claims, fight! let the fever of thy soul pass from thee.' It is an error to imagine that even when the religious man does not give up his ordinary activities, he yet becomes too *sattwic*, too saintly, too loving or too passionless for the rough work of the world. Nothing can be more extreme and uncompromising than the reply of the *Gita* in the opposite sense, 'Whosoever has his temperament purged from egoism, whosoever suffers not his soul to receive the impress of the deed, though he slays the whole world yet he slays not and is not bound.'

The Yoga Sri Aurobindo had started in Baroda now directly and openly became the whole mission of his life. His Yoga, which he called Integral Yoga, has three basic approaches — aspiration, surrender and rejection.

As early as 1904 he began the practice of *pranayama*. He describes his experiences as follows: 'The results were remarkable. Many visions of scenes and figures I used to see. I felt an electric power around my head. My powers of writing were nearly dried up — they revived with a great vigour. I could write prose and poetry with a flow. That flow has never ceased since then. If I

have not written afterwards it is because I had something else to do. But the moment I want to write it is there. Thirdly, great health. I grew stout and strong, the skin became smooth and fair and there was a flow of sweetness in the saliva. I used to feel a certain aura around the head. There were plenty of mosquitoes but these did not come to me.'

He also described some other experiences: 'Then there came a *sannyasi*—Naga—who gave me the *stotra* (hymn) of Kali. It was a very violent *stotra* with *jahi* (kill) in it. I used to repeat it, it did not give any results.

'I visited Ganganath after Bramananda's death when Keshavananda was there.

'It was at this time that I gave up meat diet and found a great feeling of lightness and purification in the system.

'With my European mind I had at that time no faith in the gods. I had gone to Karnali (near Chandod) and there are several temples there. There is one Kali temple and when I looked at the image I saw the living presence there. For the first time I believed in the "presence" of God.

'When I went to Bengal and took to political work, *pranayama* became irregular and I had a great illness which nearly carried me off.'

Sri Aurobindo clearly had some spiritual experiences before he started the practice of *pranayama*. As soon as he returned from England in 1893 he experienced a vast Calm descending upon him as he set foot on Apollo Bunder in Bombay which has already been referred to in Chapter II.

In April 1903 when he was on a tour of Kashmir he visited the hill of Shankaracharya also known as the

Takhat-i-Suleman (Seat of Solomon), and experienced the vacant Infinite in a very tangible way, and describes this experience in his poem, *Adwaita* :

Adwaita

I walked on the high-wayed Seat of Solomon,
Where Shankaracharya's tiny temple stands,
Facing Infinity from Time's edge, alone
On the bare ridge ending earth's vain romance.
Around me was a formless solitude;
All had become one strange Unnameable,
An unborn sole Reality world-nude,
Topless and fathomless, for ever still.
A Silence that was Being's only word,
The unknown beginning and the voiceless and
Abolishing all things moment-seen or heard,
On an incommunicable summit reigned,
A lonely Calm and void unchanging Peace
On the dumb crest of Nature's mysteries.

As early as 1901 Sri Aurobindo witnessed some occult phenomenon during Barin's experiments with the planchette. At about this time, Barin read a book on spiritualism and began to experiment with planchatte-writing and table-tapping. These experiments proved very interesting as may be seen from the following incidents :

1. Once Barin called Dr K. D. Ghose, his father. The reply came that he was there and he was asked to give a sign or proof of his identity. He reminded Barin of a gold watch which he had given him, a fact that Barin had completely forgotten but now remembered. Then

Barin asked the spirit to give further proof of his identity and he mentioned the existence of a certain picture on the wall in the house of a Mr Devdhar, who was an engineer. An enquiry was made but no such picture could be found. The spirit that claimed to be that of Dr K. D. Ghose was informed and he replied that they should enquire further. They made a more thorough search and found that the picture was there but had been covered over by whitewash.

2. At another seance Tilak, the great Indian nationalist leader, was present. The spirit of Dr K. D. Ghose was called and asked 'what kind of man is this?' He answered: 'When all your work will be ruined and many men will bow their heads down, this man will keep his head erect.' It proved correct.

3. Once Ramakrishna Paramhansa was called and was asked questions. But he kept silent for a long time. Then while going he said: 'Make a temple, make a temple (*mandir gado*).'

Another interesting experience in Baroda was of an accident which was narrowly averted. Sri Aurobindo was travelling in his carriage from Camp Road towards the city. Just by the side of the public gardens he saw the possibility of an accident. He found that with the will to prevent it there appeared a Being of Light in him who was there, as it were, to master the situation and to control the details.

Sri Aurobindo has described the results of prayer during an attack of illness: 'My Uncle's daughter was on the point of death by typhoid. The doctors gave up all hope and said the only thing was to pray. Then they prayed and after prayer they found that her con-

sciousness had returned.

'Another instance is that of Madhav Rao's son who was dying at Navsari. The doctors gave up hope. Madhav Rao wired his family to stop medicine and pray to God. When they prayed the boy was cured. I knew of the case myself. Madhav Rao showed me the telegram.'

Sri Aurobindo got direct proof of the power of yoga in the cure of diseases when a Naga *sadhu* cured Barin of mountain fever—which he had contracted when wandering in the Amarkantak Range—by *mantra*. The *sadhu* took a glass full of water and cut the water crosswise with a knife while repeating the *mantra*. He then told Barin to drink it saying he would not have fever the next day. And the fever left him.

Sri Aurobindo's letters to his wife, Mrinalini, also threw light on his spiritual life. On August 30, 1905 he wrote to her:

'Suffering is the inevitable result of all worldly desires..

'I have three madnesses. Firstly, it is my firm faith that whatever virtue, talent, the higher education and knowledge, and the wealth which God has given me belongs to Him; I have the right to spend only as much as is needed for the maintenance of the family and on what is absolutely necessary.

'The second folly has recently taken hold of me: it is this. By whatever means I must get the direct realisation of the Lord. The religion of today consists in repeating the name of God every now and then, in praying to Him in the presence of everybody and in showing people how religious one is; I do not want it. If the Divine is

there, then there must be a way of experiencing His existence, of realising His presence; however hard the path, I have taken a firm resolution to follow it. Hindu *dharma* asserts that the path is to be found in one's own self, in one's mind. The rule that enables one to follow the path is also given to me.

'The third folly is this: whereas others regard the country as an inert object, and know it as the plains, the fields, the forests, the mountains and rivers, I look upon my country as the mother, I worship her and adore her as the mother. What would a son do when a demon sitting on the breast of his mother is drinking her blood? Would he sit down content to take his meals, and go on enjoying himself in the company of his wife and children, or would he, rather, run to the rescue of his mother? I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race; it is not physical strength, I am not going to fight with the sword or with the gun, but with the power of knowledge. The power of the warrior is not the only kind of force, there is also the power of the *Brahman* which is founded on knowledge. This is not a new feeling within me, it is not of a recent origin, I was born with it, it is in my very marrow. God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission.'

His letter to her of February 17, 1907 reveals his detailed surrender in everyday life to the Divine will:

'My coming to meet you on the 4th January was settled but I could not come; this did not happen of my own accord. I had to go where the Lord led me. This time I did not go for my own work. I had gone for His work. The state of my mind, at present, has totally



Plate 1 — Aurobindo, aged about eleven, when he was living with the Drewitts in Manchester

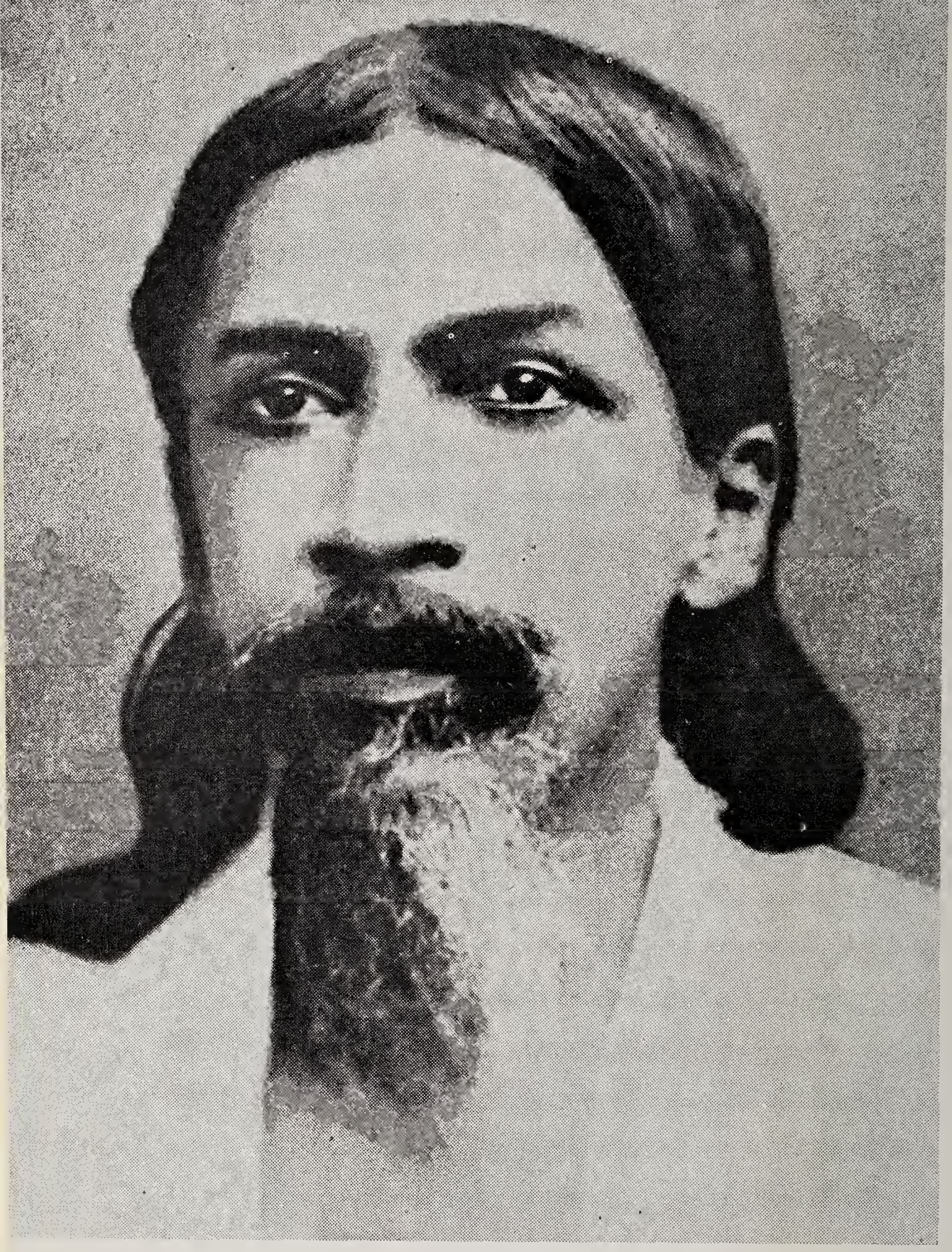


Plate 2 — 1920. In Pondicherry



Plate 3 — The Mother

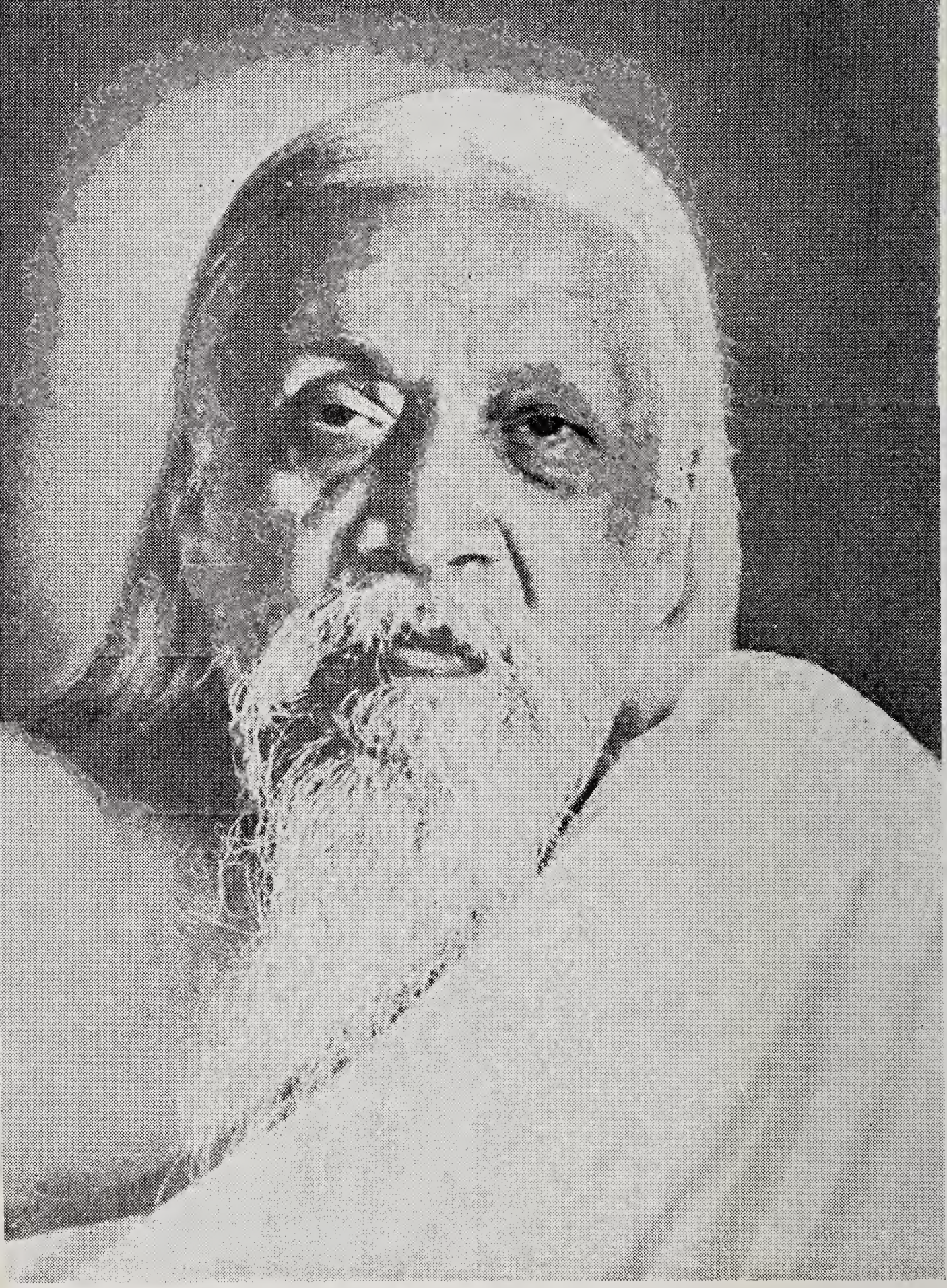


Plate 4 — April 1950. Eight months before he left his body

changed; more than that I would not reveal in this letter. Come here, then I will tell you what I have to say. The only thing that can be stated for the moment is that henceforward I am no longer my own master; I will have to go like a puppet, wherever the Divine takes me; I shall have to carry out like a puppet whatever he makes me do.'

Mrinalini Devi, however, did not live to see the full-flowering of his surrender. Eleven years later, in December 1918, she died of influenza while on her way to Pondicherry.

In December 1907 Sri Aurobindo asked Barin to arrange a meeting with someone who could help him in yoga. Barin had heard of a Maharashtrian yogi, Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, and invited him to Baroda. Sri Aurobindo remained with Lele for three days in the small room on the top floor of the house of Sardar Majumdar in Baroda.

'Sit down,' Lele told him, 'look, and you will see that your thoughts come into you from outside. Before they enter, fling them back.' Sri Aurobindo sat down and looked and saw to his astonishment that it was so. He saw and felt concretely the thought approaching as if to enter through or above the head and was able to push it back concretely before it came inside. In three days—in effect in only one day—his mind became full of an eternal silence. This was the realisation of the Silent, spaceless and limitless brahman. It was the first of Sri Aurobindo's four great realisations on which his Yoga is founded. The first realisation was attended at the beginning by an overwhelming feeling and perception of

the total unreality of the world. This feeling disappeared after his second realisation in the Alipur Jail, which was that of the Cosmic Consciousness and of the Divine as all beings and all that is.

It may be noted that after 1908 when he meditated with Lele and realised the condition of Silence of the mind, all his work and activities such as writing and making speeches were emanating from a source above mind.

In January 1908 he went to Bombay absorbed in a Silent Brahman Consciousness. In this state no thought entered his mind. There he had to lecture at the National Union and asked Lele: 'What should I do?' Lele told him to go to the meeting, make *namaskar* to the audience as Narayana and then some voice would speak. So, in fact, the speech came.

Before parting from Lele, Sri Aurobindo asked for instructions. While Lele was giving him detailed instructions, Sri Aurobindo told him of a *mantra* that had arisen in his heart. Lele asked him to rely absolutely on Him who gave him the *mantra* and that there was no need for further instructions. It was thus that Sri Aurobindo left himself entirely in the hands of the Divine Guide within him. Years later he wrote: 'The Divine Guide within urged me to proceed, adding experience after experience, reaching higher and higher, stopping at none as final, till I arrived at the glimpse of the Supermind.'

His second realisation in Alipur Jail is described in his famous Uttarpara speech:

'He turned the hearts of my jailers to me and they spoke to the Englishman in charge of the jail: "He is

suffering in his confinement: let him at least walk outside his cell for half-an-hour in the morning and in the evening." So it was arranged, and it was while I was walking that His strength again entered into me. I looked at the jail that secluded me from man and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me his shade. I looked at the bare of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door, and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and my Lover. This was the first use of the deeper vision He gave me. I looked at the prisoners in the jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies.'

He was also already on his way in his meditations in Alipur Jail to two other realisations—that of the Supreme Reality with the static and dynamic Brahman as its two aspects and that of the higher planes of consciousness leading to the Supermind. In jail he had some interesting experiences which he described from time to time. One of these experiences concerned anger and here is what he wrote about it :

'I once saw anger coming up and possessing me. I

was very much surprised as to my own nature. Anger has always been foreign to me.

'At another time (1908) while I was an under-trial prisoner in Alipur Jail, my anger would have led to a terrible catastrophe which luckily was averted. Prisoners there had to wait outside for sometime before entering the cells. As we were doing so, the Scotch warder came and gave me a push. The young men around me became very excited and I did nothing but gave him such a look that he immediately fled and called the jailer. It was a communicative anger and all the young men rallied round to attack him. When the jailer who was rather a religious man arrived, the warder said I had given him an "insubordinate" look. The jailer asked me and I told him I had never been used to such treatment. The jailer pacified the whole group and said while going: "We each have to bear our cross." '

Another experience mentioned by Sri Aurobindo pertains to the faculty to appreciate art:

'I knew something about sculpture, but I was blind to painting. Suddenly one day in the Alipur Jail while meditating I saw some pictures on the walls of the cell and, lo and behold, the artistic eye in me opened and I knew all about painting except of course the more material side of the technique. I don't always know how to express, though, because I lack the knowledge of the proper technique but that does not stand in the way of a keen and understanding appreciation. So there you are: all things are possible in Yoga.'

His experience of levitation, also in Alipur Jail, he describes as follows:

'I was having a very intense *sadhana* on the vital plane and I was concentrated. And I had a questioning mind: "Are such *siddhis* as *utthapana* (levitation) possible?" I then suddenly found myself raised up in such a way that I could not have done it myself with muscular exertion. Only one part of the body was slightly in contact with the ground and the rest was raised up against the wall. I could not have held my body like that normally even if I had wanted to and I found that the body remained suspended like that without any exertion on my part.'

Another spiritual experience in Alipur Jail concerned Vivekananda:

'It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for two weeks in the jail in my solitary meditation and felt his presence. The voice spoke only on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it finished saying all that it had to say on the subject.'

About repulsion, too, he had this experience:

'I myself, when I was young, could not read of any act of cruelty without feeling that repulsion and a feeling of hatred for those who did it. I could not kill an insect, say a bug or a mosquito. This was not because I staunchly believed in *ahimsa* but because I had that pity and nervous repulsion. Later on, even when I had no mental

objection, I could not harm anything because the body rejected the act.

'When I was in jail, I was mentally subjected to all sorts of torture for the first fifteen days. I had to look upon scenes of all sorts of sufferings before me and then the thing passed away.'

Sri Aurobindo's hair had such an unusual shine that it was the general impression of his jail companions that he used hair-oil and when asked he assured his enquirers that this was not so. The brilliance of his hair was due entirely to his *sadhana*.

During this period his view of life was radically changed. He had taken up yoga with the idea of acquiring spiritual force and energy and divine guidance for his work in life. But now the inner spiritual life and realisation, which had been continually increasing in magnitude and universality and assuming a larger place, possessed him entirely and his work became a part and result of it. This work far exceeded the service and liberation of the country and concentrated itself in an aim, previously only glimpsed, which was world-wide in its bearing and concerned with the whole future of humanity.

In the case of Sri Aurobindo, it had now become evident that 'all life is Yoga'.

The *adesh* he received in jail he voiced not only in his speeches but also in the two weekly newspapers he published—the *Karma Yogin* in English and the *Dharma* in Bengali. These weeklies were popular and fairly widely distributed in the country.

Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Karma Yogin*: 'The task we now set before ourselves is not mechanical but moral

and spiritual. We aim not at the alteration of a form of government but the building up of a nation. Of that task politics is a part, but only a part. We shall devote ourselves not to politics alone, nor to social questions alone, nor to theology or literature or science by themselves, but we include all these in one entity which we believe to be all important, the *dharma* the national religion which we also believe to be universal. There is a mighty law of life, a great principle of human evolution, a body of spiritual knowledge and experience of which India has always been destined to be guardian, exemplar and missionary. This is *sanatana dharma*, the eternal religion. We must return and seek the sources of life and strength within ourselves. We must know our past and recover it for the purpose of our future. Our business is to realise ourselves first and to mould everything to the law of India's eternal life and nature. We believe that it is to make yoga the ideal of human life that India rises today; by the yoga she will get the strength to realise her freedom, unity and greatness, by the yoga she will keep the strength to preserve it. It is a spiritual revolution we foresee and the material is only its shadow and reflex.'

And again: 'The problems which have troubled mankind can only be solved by conquering the kingdom within...'

Karma Yogin published in its various issues Sri Aurobindo's poems such as *Baji Prabhou*, *Epiphany* and others; and essays—*A System of National Education*, *Brain of India*, *National Value of Art*, *Ideal of Karma Yogin*, and English translations of *Isha*, *Kena* and *Katha Upanishads*, Kalidas' *Ritu Samhar* and Bankim's *Anand Math*. It covered a wide range of subjects and gave a spiritual perspective to them.

VII. THE *ADESH*

Sri Aurobindo had studied the temperament and characteristics of the British people and the turn of their political instincts. He believed that although they would resist any attempt at self-liberation by the Indian people and would at the most only concede very slowly such reforms as would not weaken their imperial control, still the British were not the type to be ruthlessly adamant to the end. If they found resistance and revolt becoming general and persistent they would, in the end, try to arrive at a compromise to save what they could of their empire—or in an extremity prefer to grant independence rather than have it wrested from them forcibly. The subsequent events amply bore out his surmise.

In 1905 Lord Minto succeeded Lord Curzon as Governor-General of India. Lord Minto was a Conservative. The Secretary of State in England, John Morley, was a Liberal. A letter which Morley wrote to Lord Minto is characteristic of the English character. It reads: 'But we, the Government of India, cannot shut our eyes to present conditions. The political atmosphere is full of change, questions are before us which we cannot afford to ignore and which we must attempt to answer, and to me it would appear all-important that the initiative should emanate from us, that the Government of India should not be put in the position of appearing to have its hands forced by agitation in this country or by pressure from home—that we should be the first to recognise surrounding conditions and to place before His Majesty's

Government the opinions which personal experience and close touch with the everyday life of India entitle us to hold.'

The Government's attitude to Sri Aurobindo in those days is reflected in the following letters from the Lt.-Governor of Bengal to Lord Minto:

'I attribute the spread of seditious doctrines to him, Sri Aurobindo, in a greater degree than to any other single individual in Bengal, or possibly India.' Lord Minto must have formed the same opinion for he wrote to Mr John Morley: 'I can only repeat...that he is the most dangerous man we have to reckon with...'

Sri Aurobindo attended and spoke at the provincial conference at Barisal. Meanwhile the Government was determined to get rid of him and decided to deport him. This scheme became known to Sister Nivedita, the Irish disciple of Swami Vivekananda—she was also a revolutionary and had kept in contact with Sri Aurobindo during his activities. They had met for the first time in Baroda in 1902. Before this meeting she had known of him as *Kaliupasak*, or a revolutionary. Later, when he organised a committee of five members in Bengal in 1903 to carry on the work there, Sister Nivedita was also a member. Now she advised him to leave British India and work from outside—but Sri Aurobindo had another solution. On December 25, 1909 he published an open letter to his countrymen in the *Karma Yogin* in which he spoke of the prospect of deportation and left to the country what he called his last Will and Testament. He felt sure this would kill the idea of deportation—and he was right.

Even so the Government was not going to be thwarted in its plans so easily. Sri Aurobindo received information of the Government's intention to search the office of the *Karma Yogin* and arrest him. He was in the *Karma Yogin* office together with others and ideas were exchanged on the next course of action. Ramchandra Majumdar was prepared to fight. Sri Aurobindo was considering his next move. Suddenly, as he himself has described, an *adesh* came to him: 'I heard a voice from above saying—"No, go to Chandernagore." After leaving jail I used to hear voices. In those days I used to obey them without questioning.'

He wasted no time. In ten minutes he was on the bank of the Ganges where he boarded a boat for Chandernagore in French India. It was in February 1910 that he was in hiding in Chandernagore. From time to time he changed his place of abode to avoid detection. Motilal Roy, a leading citizen of Chandernagore, was mainly instrumental in all his arrangements. Sri Aurobindo sent a message to Sister Nivedita asking her to take up the editorship of *Karma Yogin* in his absence.

Even under such stress Sri Aurobindo's *sadhana* continued with great intensity. He used to see figures of three or four goddesses at the time of meditation. Later, in Pondicherry, when he undertook the study of the Vedas, he recognised them as Ila, Bharati, Mahi and Saraswati, the Vedic goddesses.

Sri Aurobindo was wondering what to do next. Some friends had suggested that he should go to France. Again came the *adesh*, this time to go to Pondicherry.

Sri Aurobindo returned to Calcutta on March 31, 1910 in a boat manned by some young revolutionaries

of Uttarpara. There he boarded the s.s. *Dupleix* under the assumed name of Jyotindranath Mitter. The steamer left for Pondicherry in the early hours of April 1, 1910.

VIII. IN PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY, on the coast of the south-west of India, has a very ancient spiritual history. According to tradition Rishi Agastya came from the north and settled in Pondicherry; at that time it was called Vedpuri. Jouveau-Debreuil, a French archaeologist, supports this tradition.

Sri Aurobindo arrived in Pondicherry on April 4, 1910 at 4 p.m. The occult significance of the number four is 'the Supramental realisation in the physical'.

From this time onwards, Sri Aurobindo's practice of yoga became more and more absorbing. He dropped all participation in public political activities and refused more than one request to preside at sessions of the revived Indian National Congress. For some years he kept up private communication with the revolutionary forces he had led through one or two individuals, but this also he dropped after a time. As his vision of the future grew clearer, he saw that the eventual independence of India was assured. Apart from this the magnitude of the spiritual work before him became increasingly clear to him and he realised that it would absorb all of his energies.

While he was in Alipur Jail the spirit of Vivekananda had given him the clue to that which Sri Aurobindo later termed 'Supermind'. This clue led him to see how this truth-consciousness was working in everything. It was essential for the welfare of mankind that this consciousness should descend and transform the earth. In fact that was the only way to lift humanity out of the painful chaos it was in. As he explained later to Barin: 'If

one cannot rise above, that is to the supramental level, it is hardly possible to know the last secret of the world. The problem of the world does not get solved.'

Sri Aurobindo held that there is an ascending evolution in nature which goes from the stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man. Because man is, for the moment, at the summit of ascending evolution, he considers himself the final stage in this ascension and believes there can be nothing on earth superior to him. In that he is mistaken. In his physical nature he is still wholly an animal, a thinking and speaking animal, but yet an animal in his material habits and instincts. Undoubtedly nature cannot be satisfied with such an imperfection. She endeavours to evolve a being who will be to man what man is to the animal, a being whose consciousness will rise far above the mental being and its slavery to ignorance.

Sri Aurobindo came upon the earth to teach this truth to man. He taught that man is a transitional being living in a mental consciousness but with the possibility of acquiring a new consciousness, the Truth-consciousness, and capable of living a life perfectly harmonious, good and beautiful, happy and fully conscious. Sri Aurobindo gave all his time to establish in himself this consciousness he called 'supramental' and to help those gathered around him to realise it.

The aim of his Yoga is an inner self-development, by which each one who follows it can in time discover the one self in all and evolve a higher consciousness than the mental—a spiritual and supramental consciousness which will transform and divinise human nature.

This did not mean, as most people supposed, that he

had retired into some height of spiritual experience devoid of any further interest in the world or in the fate of India. It could not mean that, for the very principle of his Yoga was not only to realise the Divine and attain complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the spirit and give it a spiritual meaning. In his retirement Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action.

From the day of his arrival until October 1910 Sri Aurobindo stayed in Shanker Chetty's house in Comty Chetty Street as his guest. Swami Vivekananda had also stayed in this house during his visit to Pondicherry. Later Sri Aurobindo moved to Rue Suffren, to a house belonging to Sundar Chetty.

Several years earlier a South Indian yogi, Nagai Japata, had forecast the arrival of Sri Aurobindo. Knowing that he would soon be leaving his body, this yogi called his devotees to come and meet him. K. V. R. Iyenger, who was then the Zamindar of Kadailam, asked him, 'From whom will I take spiritual guidance in the future?' The *guru* replied, 'From a great Yogi who will come from the north,' and added that this great yogi would be seeking refuge in the south and would declare three things before his arrival. Sri Aurobindo, it will be recalled, had referred to the three aspirations in his life—or 'three madnesses' as he called them—in a letter to his wife, Mrinalini Devi. K. V. R. Iyenger realised that it was to Sri Aurobindo that Nagai Japata

had referred and he went to see him.

With K. V. R. Iyenger came Ramaswamy Iyenger, later known in the Tamil literary world as 'Va-Ra'. Sri Aurobindo had seen him in a vision before he came to him, not as he first came, a smooth-faced Vaishnava but as he subsequently became after one year's stay in Pondicherry, a bearded *sadhak*.

K. V. R. Iyenger also helped Sri Aurobindo financially and published the book *Yogic Sadhana*. This book was a result of experiments in 'automatic writing'. During the writing of this book a figure was seen who resembled Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Barin had done some very extraordinary automatic writings at Baroda and Sri Aurobindo decided to find out, by practising this kind of writing himself, what was behind it, but the results did not satisfy him. After a few further attempts in Pondicherry he dropped these experiments.

Even before Sri Aurobindo's arrival in Pondicherry, the town had harboured some revolutionaries and political refugees from India, for example Subramanyam Bharati, Srinivasachari, Nayaswamy Iyer, V. Ramaswamy Iyenger, V. V. Aiyar, and others. Some of them were conducting a weekly paper in Tamil called *India* dedicated to India's independence.

The British Government in India continued to be apprehensive about Sri Aurobindo. People from the C.I.D. were posted to keep a watch on him and if possible to kidnap him and take him back to British India. A rich stevedore in Pondicherry, Nand Gopal Chetty, seemed to have agreed to assist in executing this nefarious plan. He did not succeed, however, and a warrant of arrest was issued against him on the very day he was supposed to

carry out his plan to kidnap Sri Aurobindo and he himself had to flee to Madras.

Thus thwarted, the British secret agents hatched another plan to implicate Sri Aurobindo. They hid a tin containing seditious literature, some of it in Bengali, in the well of the house of V. V. S. Aiyar, one of Sri Aurobindo's friends. Simultaneously the British agents employed a man named Mayasen to inform the police that Aiyar and others were engaged in dangerous activities and proof could be obtained by searching their houses. Fortunately one of Aiyar's servants saw the tin in the well and on Sri Aurobindo's advice Aiyar informed the police. The French police arrived and found the tin with its implicating literature. Sri Aurobindo's house was searched. Monsieur Nandat, the investigating magistrate, was intrigued to discover that Sri Aurobindo was familiar with several European languages, including Greek. This engendered his respect and he even went so far as to invite Sri Aurobindo to his chambers.

Mayasen the informer, finding his plan had misfired and fearing a prosecution on a charge of false representation, fled to British India.

The shadowing by the C.I.D. continued. A certain Nagan Nag came to Pondicherry from Khulna to see if Sri Aurobindo's blessings would cure his tuberculosis. This gave the C.I.D. a chance to enter Sri Aurobindo's house. They managed to get one of their agents (Birendra Nath Roy) employed as a cook with Nagan and thus helped him to enter Sri Aurobindo's household. After some months this 'cook' wanted to return to Bengal, so he asked the police to send a substitute. The arrangement was that the new 'cook' would recognise Birendra by his clean-

shaven head and that they would meet at a local hotel. As the day of the arrival of the substitute drew near, Birendra shaved off his hair, as arranged. Moni (Suresh Chakravarty), who was staying with Sri Aurobindo, also decided by some odd coincidence to shave his head. Birendra got alarmed and tried to dissuade him but Moni insisted. Biren became increasingly frightened thinking that Moni must have discovered his true identity. Eventually he confessed that he was a C.I.D. agent, sat down at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and wept, offering him the money sent to him by the British Government.

In 1912 the British Government increased their pressure on the French Government to hand over political refugees who were staying in French India. All the political refugees were dependent on the French Government for their safety and they were naturally alarmed. One of them in particular, Subramanyam Bharati, a man of excitable nature, asked Sri Aurobindo what he would do if the French Government withdrew their support. Sri Aurobindo calmly replied: 'Mr. Bharati, I am not going to budge an inch from Pondicherry. I know nothing will happen to me. As for yourself, you can do what you like.' On the strength of this, Subramanyam Bharati also decided to remain in Pondicherry.

This was a time of financial difficulties. Sri Aurobindo once wrote to Motilal Roy of Chandernagore: 'The situation just now is that we have Re. $\frac{1}{2}$ or so in hand...no doubt God will provide, but He has contracted a bad habit of waiting till the last moment.'

K. Amrita, later manager of the Ashram, used to stay in Pondicherry during his school vacations and he too was in financial difficulties. Sri Aurobindo, despite his

own difficulties, helped him. Sri Aurobindo also gave the rights of his book *War and Self-determination* to his sister Sarojini as she too was in straitened circumstances.

Sri Aurobindo had once fasted for ten days in Alipur Jail. Now he fasted for the second time for twenty-three days. During this period his work, exercise, meditation and writing continued as usual and he did not find himself in the least weak. He lost weight, however, but he did not find a clue to replace it. He did not break the fast gradually but started taking the normal quantity of food immediately.

What was the state of the practice of the Yoga by Sri Aurobindo during this period? Sri Aurobindo has already considerably developed the powers to bring down the spiritual to the material plane. As early as July 12, 1911, he wrote in a letter: 'I am developing the necessary powers for bringing down the spiritual on the material plane and I am now able to put myself into men and change them, removing darkness and bringing light, giving them a new heart and a new mind. This I can do with great swiftness and completeness with those who are near me, but I have also succeeded with men hundreds of miles away. I have also been given the power to read men's characters and hearts, even their thoughts, but this power is not yet absolutely complete, nor can I use it always and in all cases. The power of guiding action by the mere exercise of will is also developing, but it is not so powerful as yet as the other. My communication with the other world is yet of a troubled character, though I am certainly in communication with some very great powers. But of all these things I will write more when

the final obstacles in my way are cleared from the path.'

Sri Aurobindo's *sadhana* and work were still waiting for the coming of the one who was to be his true collaborator, the Mother. And she came from France on March 29, 1914.

IX. THE MOTHER

On March 29, 1914 at 3.30 p.m., a young Frenchwoman, Mira Richard, now known the world over as The Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, met Sri Aurobindo for the first time.

Prior to coming to Pondicherry she had sent, in 1910, a diagram of the Star of David (which is partly the same as Sri Aurobindo's symbol) and when Sri Aurobindo explained its symbolic meaning she had the confirmation that it was with him that she was destined to work.

At their very first meeting on March 29, 1914 she recognised him as the Being who had been guiding her in her *sadhana* and whom she used to call Sri Krishna.

This is what The Mother has said about her first meeting with Sri Aurobindo: 'I was in deep concentration, seeing things in the Supermind, things that were to be but which were somehow not manifesting. I told Sri Aurobindo what I had seen and asked him if they would manifest. He simply said "Yes" and immediately I saw that the supramental had touched the earth and was beginning to be realised. This was the first time I had witnessed the power to make real what is true.'

The following day, on March 30, she wrote in her diary: 'It matters not if there are hundreds of beings plunged in the densest ignorance. He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when the darkness shall be transformed into light, when Thy reign shall be, indeed, established upon earth.'

Born in Paris on February 21, 1878, The Mother was 36 when she first met Sri Aurobindo. On the occasion of one of her birthdays she said: 'I am by birth French, but by soul and predilection, Indian.'

The Mother was above the human even from her childhood. In an article written by K. D. Sethna and published in *Mother India* (February 1958), some information is given concerning the pre-Pondicherry life of The Mother and some extracts are given here:

'All during her girlhood she (The Mother) was conscious of a more than human force behind her and often entering her body and working there in a supernormal way. This force she knew to be her own secret being. A few instances of its working may be given. She was about seven. There was a boy of nearly thirteen, a bully who always used to mock at girls, saying that they were good for nothing. One day she asked him: "Will you shut up?" He kept on mocking. Suddenly she took hold of him, lifted him up from the ground and threw him down with a thump though she was so much smaller than he. The force that had come down into her and made her tremendously strong was recognised by her later in life as Mahakali.

'Another instance. She had gone to play in a forest near Fontainebleu. She was climbing a steep hill, when her foot slipped and she began to fall. The road was strewn with sharp black stones. As she was falling, she felt somebody supporting her in a lap, as it were, and slowly bringing her down. When she reached the ground she was standing safely on her two feet, to the glad astonishment of all her companions.

'In her sixteenth year she joined a studio to learn painting. It was one of the biggest studios in Paris. She happened to be the youngest there. All the other people used to talk and quarrel among themselves, but she never took part in these things—she was always grave and busy with her work. They called her the Sphinx. Whenever they had any trouble or wrangle, they would come to her to settle their affairs. She would read their thoughts and, as she replied more often to their thoughts than to their words, they felt very uncomfortable. She would also make her decisions without the least fear, even if the authorities were concerned. Once a girl who had been appointed monitress of the studio got into the bad books of the elderly lady who was the Head of the place. This lady wanted to send away the monitress. So the Sphinx was sought out by the young girl for help. She felt sympathy for the girl, knowing how poor she was and that if she left the studio it would be the end of her painting career. The head of the Studio had now to confront a determined little champion. Sensible pleading was first tried, but when it fell on deaf ears, the champion took another line. With a bit of anger she caught the elderly woman's hand and held it in a firm grip as if the very bones would be crushed. It was soon agreed that the monitress would be allowed to stay on. Mahakali had been at work again.

'The Sphinx of the Studio was also the same serious self at home. She rarely smiled or laughed. And for this, once when she was about twenty, she got a scolding from her mother. She simply replied that she had to bear all the sorrows of the world. Her mother thought she had gone crazy. On another occasion she was scold-

ed by her mother for not listening to what she was ordered to do. Then she answered that no earthly power could command her obedience.

'During her body's sleep occult instructions were given to her by several teachers, some of whom she met afterwards on the physical plane. Later on, as the inner and outer development proceeded, a psychic and spiritual relation with one of these Beings became more and more clear and frequent and, although she knew little of the Indian philosophies and religions at that time, she was led to call him Krishna and henceforth she was aware that it was with him whom she knew she would meet some day that the divine work was to be done. Being a painter, she made a psychically impressionist sketch of him.

'She spent some years in Tangiers, Algeria, learning higher occultism from a Polish adept, Theon by name, and his still more profoundly experienced French wife.'

The Mother describes her early years as follows: 'Between eleven and thirteen a series of psychic and spiritual experiences revealed to me not only the existence of God but man's possibility of meeting with Him or revealing Him integrally in consciousness and action, of manifesting Him upon earth in a life divine.'

In her spiritual diary called *Prayers and Meditations*, we find recorded several experiences which provide glimpses of her *sadhana* and her true role on the earth. Here is one: 'When I was a child—about the age of thirteen and for about a year—every night as soon as I was in bed, it seemed to me that I came out of my body and rose straight up above the house, then above the town, very high, I

saw myself then clad in a magnificent golden robe, longer than myself, and as I rose, that robe lengthened, spreading in a circle around me to form as it were an immense roof over the town. Then I would see coming out from all sides men, women, children, old men, sick men, unhappy men; they gathered under the outspread robe, imploring help, recounting their miseries, their sufferings, their pains. In reply, the robe, supple and living, stretched out to them individually, and as soon as they touched it, they were consoled or healed, and entered back into their bodies happier and stronger than they had ever been before coming out.'

Her stay in Pondicherry was for less than a year, because the First World War had broken out. She left for France on February 22, 1915. From France she went to Japan in 1916, where she stayed for about four years, till she returned to India.

In 1919, Rabindranath Tagore met The Mother in Japan. They were staying in the same hotel for some time. He one day requested her to take charge of Shantiniketan, but The Mother did not accept this offer as she knew her future work lay with Sri Aurobindo.

After The Mother left for France on February 22, 1915, she used to write occasionally to Sri Aurobindo of her experiences and he used to reply. In his letter of June 26, 1916 he wrote: 'To possess securely the light and force of the Supramental being, this is the main object to which the power is now turning. But the progress was hampered. The old habits of the intellectual thought and mental will poured in their suggestions in the mind, whenever it tried to remain open to the Supramental light and the command. Hence the knowledge and the will

reached the mind in a confused, distorted and often misleading form.'

On August 15, 1914 Sri Aurobindo started a journal called *Arya* in collaboration with The Mother. The object of the journal was twofold—first a systematic study of the highest problems of existence, and second the formation of a vast synthesis of knowledge, harmonising the diverse religious traditions of humanity, occidental as well as oriental. Its methods were that of realism, at once rational and transcendental—a realism consisting of the unification of intellectual and scientific disciplines with those of intuitive experience. This review was also intended to serve as an organ for the various groups and societies founded on its inspiration.

Simultaneously, a French translation of *Arya*, entitled *Revue de Grande Synthese* (*A Review of the Great Synthesis*), was published in Pondicherry. This publication ceased after a few months because of the increasing tempo of the First World War.

Arya serialised *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Essays on the Gita*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture* and *The Future Poetry*. Besides these there were short articles: *The Wherefore of the Worlds*, *Annotated Texts—Isha Upanishad*, etc. and varieties like *The Soul of a Plant*, *The Question of the Month*, *The News of the Month*, *The South India Bronzes*, and others. His writings were the result of his study and meditation. A vast power came pressing down on him and *Arya* was transmitted directly into the pen.

At the beginning of 1921 the publication of *Arya* was discontinued. It was a profitable publication but as Sri

Aurobindo was by now becoming more absorbed in the real purpose of his life, the ascent to and the descent of the Supermind, he found less and less time for such writings.

The Mother returned to Pondicherry on April 24, 1920 never to leave again. On November 24 in the same year there was a very heavy rain storm, which caused damage to the roof of the house in which she was staying. Sri Aurobindo heard about this and also that the damage was such that it was considered unsafe for The Mother to remain in the house. He therefore invited her to move to the house where he was staying at No. 41 Rue Francois Martin.

In 1921 collective meditation was started. These meditations were usually held at about four in the afternoon, followed by talks on different subjects.

On January 1, 1922 The Mother took charge of the entire management of the house. In September 1922 they moved from No. 41 Rue Francois Martin (afterwards called the Guest House) to No. 9 Rue de la Marine, the present main house of the Ashram where the *samadhi* of Sri Aurobindo now stands.

X. THE DESCENT OF THE OVERMIND

Sri Aurobindo's *sadhana* continued unabated. He refused more than one request to preside at sessions of the Indian National Congress. In this connection his letter to Dr Munje written in August 1920 is especially illuminating: 'As I have already wired you, I find myself unable to accept your offer of the Presidentship of the Nagpur Congress... I have definitely commenced another kind of work with a spiritual basis, a work of spiritual, social, cultural and economic reconstruction of an almost revolutionary kind and am ever making or at least supervising a sort of practical or laboratory experiment in that sense which needs all the attention and energy that I have. I have taken it up as my mission for the rest of my life...'

He always encouraged for *sadhana* those he found ready for it. One of his disciples, Ambubhai Purani, who was in the nationalist movement, met Sri Aurobindo in December 1918. Sri Aurobindo asked him about his *sadhana*. Purani described his efforts adding '...it is difficult to concentrate on it so long as India is not free'. Sri Aurobindo then enquired: 'Suppose an assurance is given to you that India will be free ?' Purani was non-plussed: 'Who can give such an assurance?' he asked. Sri Aurobindo replied: 'Suppose I give you the assurance?' This answer satisfied Purani who said: 'If you give the assurance, I can accept it.' Turning to him, Sri Aurobindo answered: 'Then I give you the assurance that India will be free.'

His personal question solved, Purani returned happily to Gujarat. On his return to Pondicherry in 1921 he found Sri Aurobindo's body glowing with a creamy white light. Sri Aurobindo explained that when the Higher-consciousness descends from the mental level to the vital, and even below the vital, then a great transformation takes place in the nervous and in the physical being. A few days later Purani asked him: 'What are you waiting for?' Sri Aurobindo replied in his usual soft voice: 'It is true that the Divine Consciousness has descended, but it has not yet descended into the physical being. So long as that work is not done, the work cannot be said to be accomplished.'

In mid-winter 1921 the well-known stone-throwing incident occurred. Vattal, a cook, was dismissed. Infuriated, he went to a Mussalman who was well-versed in black magic. This fakir started the throwing of stones in one of the Ashram houses by de-materialising them in one place and re-materialising them in another. The police were sent for but they abandoned the case in a panic when a stone whizzed unaccountably between the legs of a policeman. A servant in the house was the particular target. The Mother from her knowledge of these things decided that the process here must depend on a nexus between the servant and the house. So the servant was sent away and the whole phenomenon ceased.

The cook, Vattal, fell desperately ill. His wife appealed to Sri Aurobindo who in his generosity forgave him, saying: 'For this he need not die.' And Vattal recovered.

In 1923 the disciples decided to celebrate Sri Aurobindo's

birthday. Sri Aurobindo remarked: 'It is by living the Truth that we can celebrate it.'

Next year, in 1924, speaking on his birthday he said: 'I prefer to communicate through the silent consciousness, because speech addresses itself to the mind, while through the silent consciousness one can reach something deeper.'

Two years later, on November 24, 1926 something momentous happened—the descent of the overmind in the physical. Among those who are acquainted with Sri Aurobindo's writings, it is known as 'the Day of the Siddhi'. This day is one of the four *darshan* days of the Ashram.

From the beginning of 1926 the *sadhaks* felt increasingly the pressure of a higher power and they started turning to The Mother for guidance.

There was a kind of expectancy in the atmosphere and on the evening of November 24, 1926 the disciples, in response to word sent out to them, assembled on the verandah where the usual meditation was held. Curiously enough, they were 24 in number. On the wall behind Sri Aurobindo and The Mother hung a curtain with three Chinese dragons embroidered on it in gold. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo gave blessings to the disciples and a short meditation followed. Though there was always a luminous atmosphere in the Ashram, that day it was much more apparent. Sri Aurobindo described this event as follows:

'The 24th November 1926 was the descent of Krishna into the physical. Krishna is not the supramental light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the

Overmind Godhead, preparing...the descent of the Supermind and *ananda*.'

The descent of the Supermind in the earth consciousness took place thirty years later in 1956.

Soon after November 1926 Sri Aurobindo ceased all personal contact with the disciples and visitors and went into seclusion. The Mother then took complete charge of the Ashram. A number of *sadhaks* were upset at the retirement of Sri Aurobindo, who reassured them as follows: 'You consider that The Mother can be of no help to you...If you cannot profit by her help you would find still less profit in mine. But, in any case, I have no intention of altering the arrangement I have made for all the disciples without exception that they should receive the light and force from her and not directly from me and be guided by her in their spiritual progress. I have made the arrangement not for any temporary purpose but because it is the one way, provided the disciple is open and receives, that is true and effective (considering what she is and her power).'

About this time there was a general impression that Sri Aurobindo's Yoga was not new, that only the terms he used like 'supramental' were new, and that the ancients had realised it long ago. To correct this impression, Sri Aurobindo wrote: 'There is an idea that this Yoga has been attempted times without number in the past, that the Light descended and has withdrawn again and again. This does not seem to be correct. I find that the Supramental physical body has not been brought down; otherwise it would have been there. We must not therefore belittle our effort and throw obstacles in the

way of its accomplishment.'

The *sadhana* of the supermind continued. The base for its descent was being prepared.

In 1935 Sri Aurobindo wrote: 'There are already more than five or six in the Ashram who have had some realisation at least of the Divine... Some have Vedantic and some *bhakti* realisations too. But all that does not count because what is a full realisation outside is here only a beginning of *siddhi*. Here the test is transformation of nature, psychic, spiritual, finally supramental.'

On November 24, 1938 at about 2 a.m. Sri Aurobindo slipped in his room and seriously fractured his right knee. The *darshan* had to be cancelled.

'The hostile forces have tried many times to prevent things like the *darshan*,' stated Sri Aurobindo, 'but I have succeeded in warding off all their attacks. At the time of the accident to my leg, I was occupied with guarding The Mother and I forgot about myself. I didn't think the hostiles would attack me. That was my mistake.' And again in another context: 'Of course, I accept it as a fact of the battle.'

Owing to this accident some doctors and disciples got the opportunity of attending on him personally.

After his physical retirement in November 1926, Sri Aurobindo gave *darshan* thrice in the year—on February 21, August 15 and November 24. After 1939 April 24 was added as the fourth *darshan* day. They fall on The Mother's birthday, his own birthday, the *Siddhi* Day and the day of The Mother's final arrival in Pondicherry.

Once a blind *sadhu*, who had come for *darshan*, was asked what was the good of his coming for *darshan* since he could not see. The *sadhu* replied: 'It is far more important

that Sri Aurobindo casts his Divine eyes on me.' How many people felt fulfilled when they stood in his presence and a look from him penetrated the depth of their being! No wonder they came again and again. How wonderful it would be if they could see him once a month! And the prayers were conveyed to the Master. But he did not accede to them. 'If I went out once a month,' he replied, 'the effect of my going out would be diminished by one-third.'

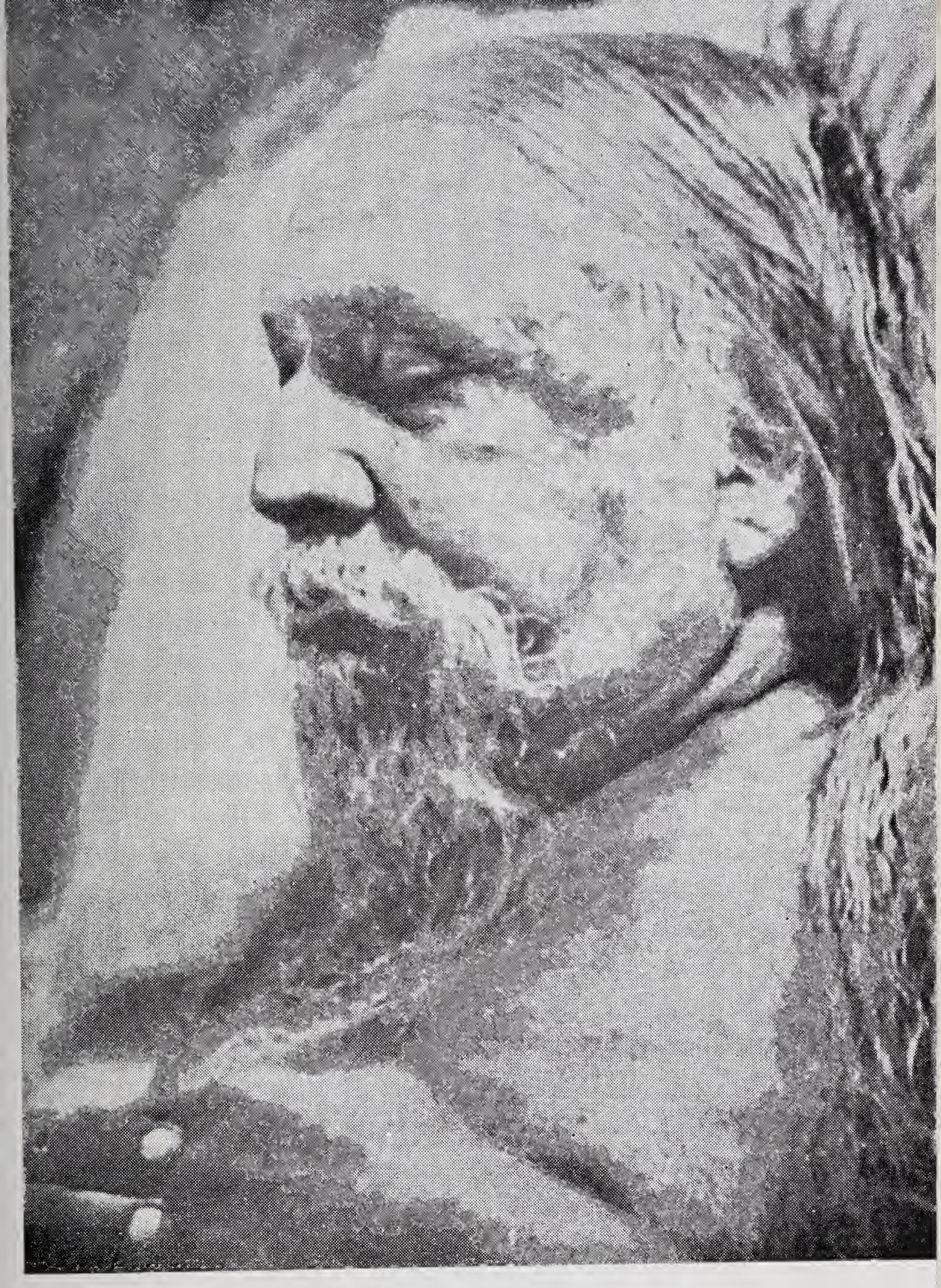


Plate 5 — December 1950. Mahasamadhi

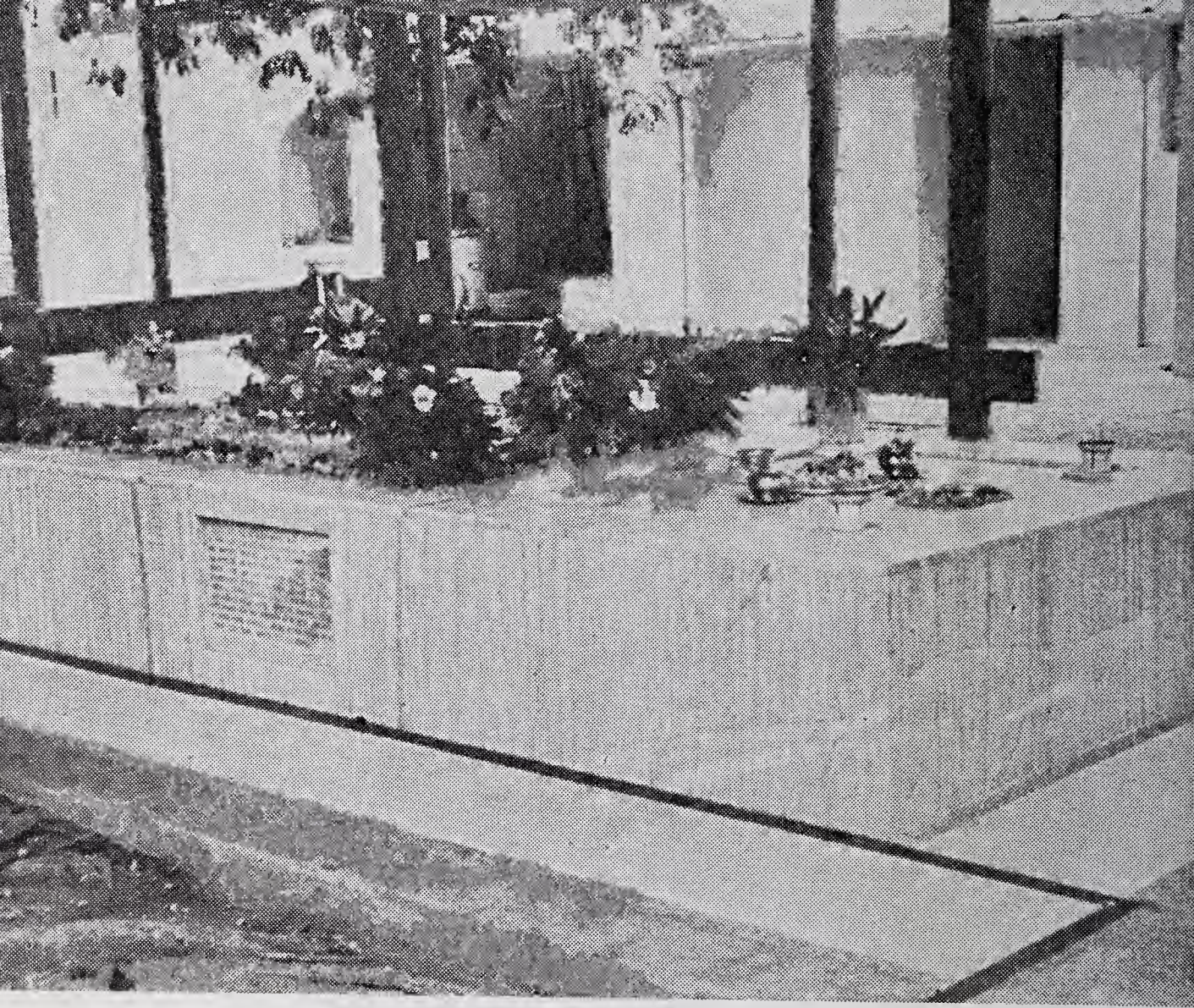
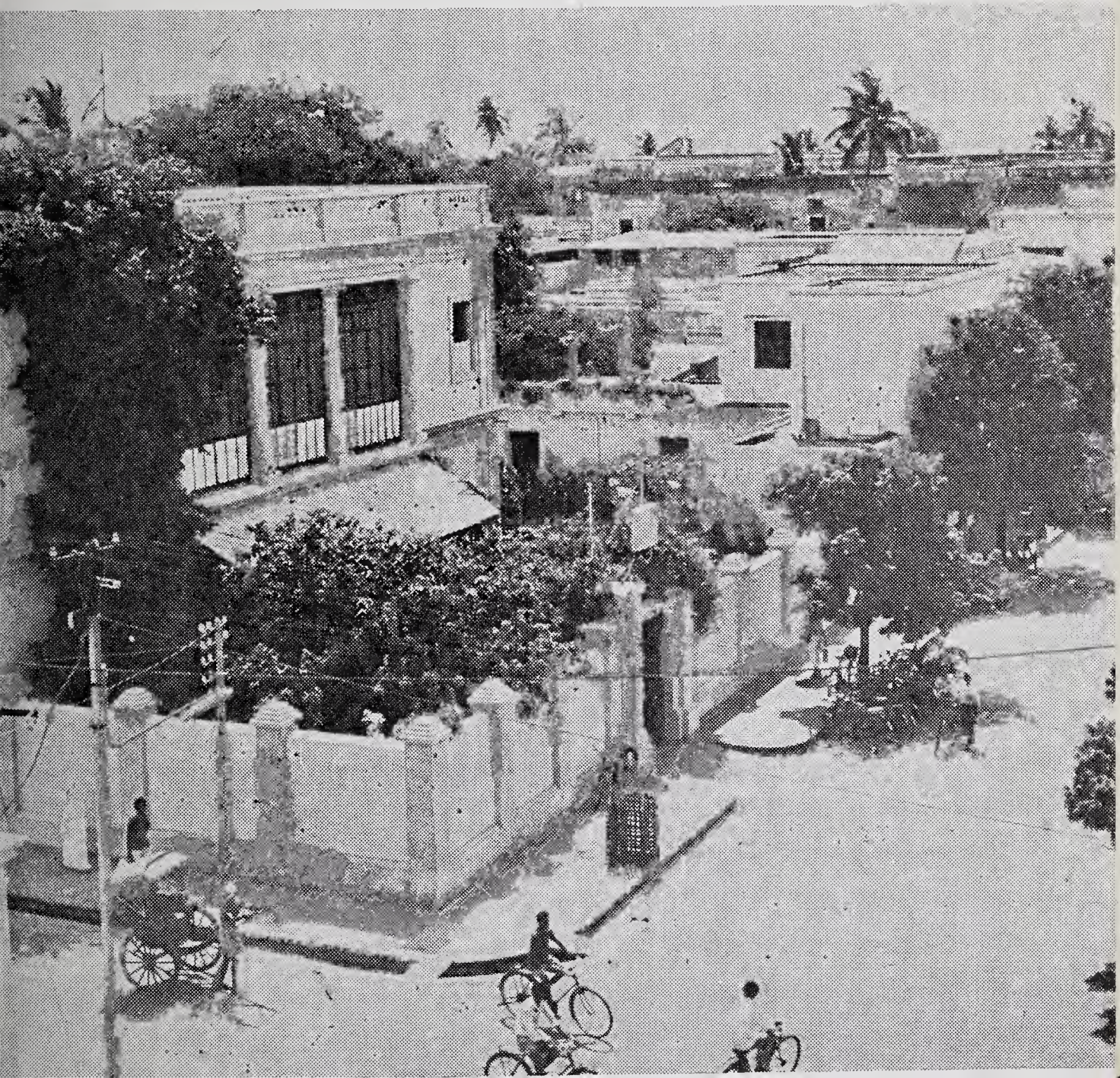


Plate 6 — Sri Aurobindo's samadhi in the Ashram

Plate 7 — The main buildings of the Ashram



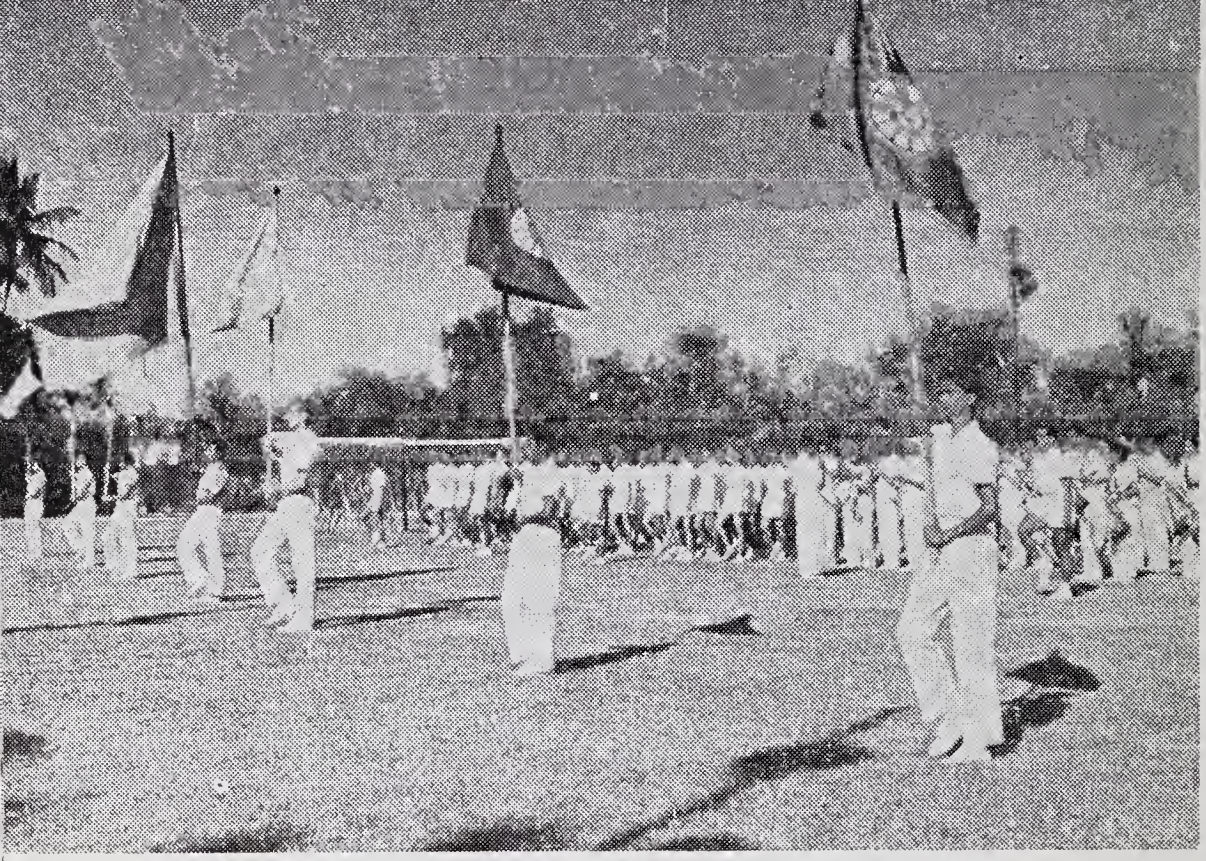
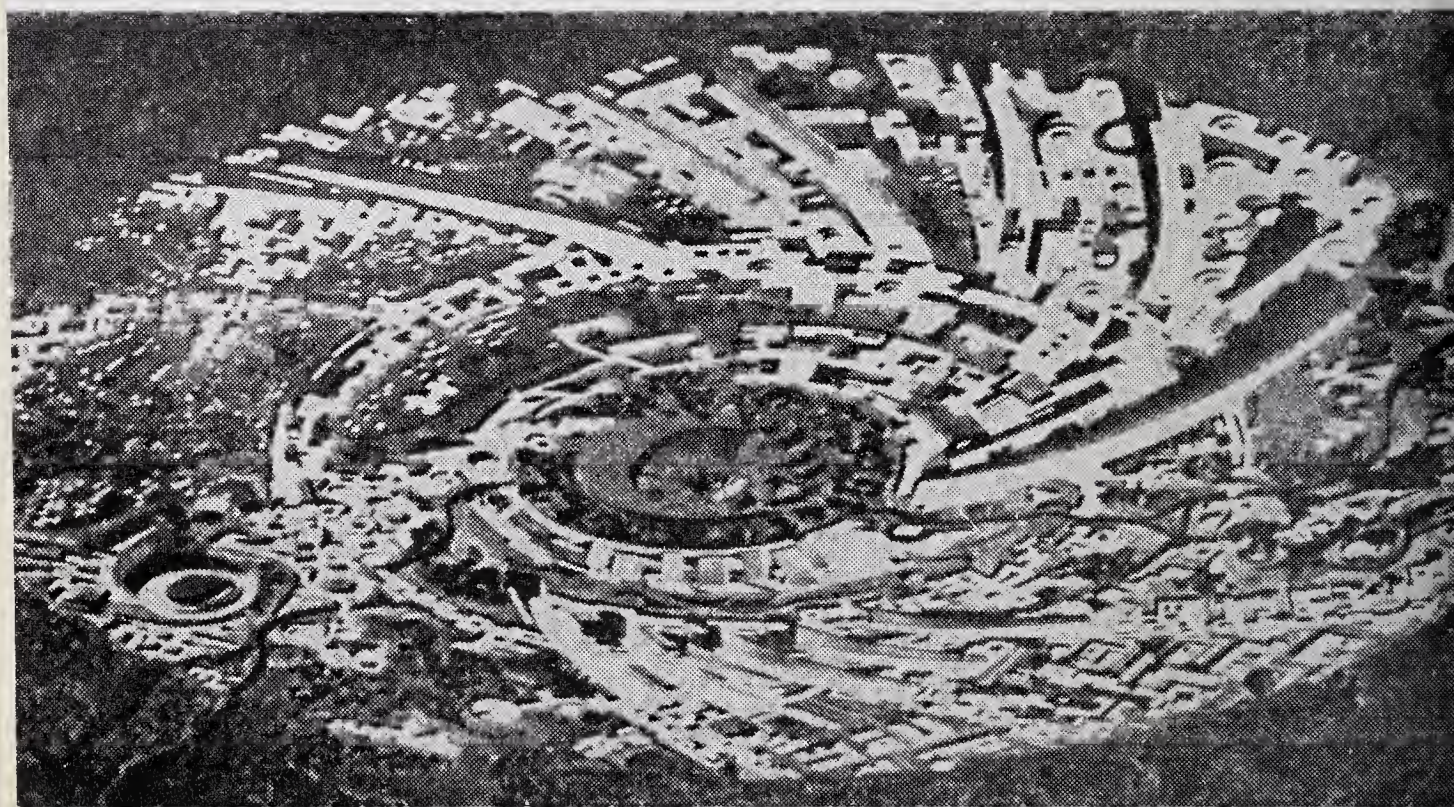


Plate 8 — At the Ashram's sports ground—march past on December 1, the anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's International Centre of Education

Plate 9 — A model showing an architect's impression of Auroville, universal city of the future



XI. SPIRITUAL FORCE IN ACTION

Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world. When the Second World War broke out in September 1939 he did not at first actively concern himself with it. After the French yielded to the Nazis, however, and the British forces had evacuated *via* Dunkirk, he put his spiritual force behind the Allies. Then he had the satisfaction of seeing the rush of the German victory almost immediately arrested and the tide of the war begin to turn in the opposite direction.

There is a spiritual dynamic power which can be possessed by those who are advanced in the spiritual consciousness. It was this force which, as soon as Sri Aurobindo had attained it, he used at first only in the limited field of personal work but afterwards constantly upon world forces.

On March 13, 1944 Sri Aurobindo wrote to a disciple: 'Certainly my force is not limited to the Ashram and its conditions. As you know, it is being largely used for helping the right development of the war and of change in the human world.'

In another letter to one of his disciples he explained the reasons for his intervention: 'You should not think of it as a fight of certain nations against others or even for India; it is a struggle for an ideal that has to establish itself on earth in the life of humanity, for a Truth that has yet to realise itself fully and against a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overwhelm the earth and mankind in the immediate future. It is the forces behind

the battle that have to be seen and not this or that superficial circumstance... There cannot be the slightest doubt that if the one side wins, there will be an end of all such freedom and hope of light and truth and the work that has to be done will be subjected to conditions which would make it humanly impossible; there will be a reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race, such as people in this country do not dream of and cannot yet at all realise. If the other side that had declared itself for the free future of humanity triumphs, this terrible danger will have been averted and conditions will have been created in which there will be a chance for the Ideal to grow for the Divine work to be done, for the spiritual Truth for which we stand to establish itself on the earth. Those who fight for this cause are fighting for the Divine and against the threatened reign of the *asura*.'

Sri Aurobindo contributed to the War Fund. In 1942, when Sir Stafford Cripps came with his proposal for granting India full independent Dominion status after the end of the war, he recommended acceptance. The Indian leaders, however, were in no mood to listen. Sri Aurobindo returned to his reliance on the use of spiritual force alone against the aggressors. He had not, for various reasons, intervened with his spiritual force against Japanese aggression until it became evident that Japan intended to attack and even invade and conquer India. Then again he used his spiritual force and had the satisfaction of seeing the tide of Japanese victory, which had until then swept everything before it, change immediately into a tide of rapid, crushing and finally immense and overwhelming defeat. He had also, after a time, the satis-

faction of seeing his pre-visions about the future of India justify themselves so that she stood independent, despite internal difficulties.

He wrote: 'To guide internally is a million times easier than to guide externally. Let us suppose I want General X to beat Y's fellow back to G. I put the right force on him and he wakes up and with his military knowledge and capacity, does the right thing and it is done. But if I, having no latent or patent military genius of knowledge in me, write to him and say "Do this, do that" he won't do it and I would not be able to do it either. It is operations of two quite different spheres of consciousness.'

He quietly used his force on other occasions too. To use his own words: 'In Spain I was splendidly successful. General Miaca was an admirable instrument to work on. Working of the Force depends on the instrument. Basque was an utter failure. Nagus was a good instrument but people around him though good warriors were too ill-organised and ill-occupied. Egypt was not successful. Ireland and Turkey a tremendous success. In Ireland I have done exactly what I wanted to do in Bengal. . .'

A line from *Savitri*, 'The world, unknowing for the world she stood', just fits in in his work.

On another occasion Sri Aurobindo said: 'It looks ridiculous and also arrogant if I were to say that I worked for the success of the Russian revolution for three years. I was one of the influences that worked to make it a success.'

On August 15, 1947 India became independent. We give below some extracts from a message Sri Aurobindo

gave on this occasion wherein he has stated his dreams for the future:

'August 15th, 1947 is my own birthday and it is naturally gratifying to me that it should have assumed this vast significance. I take this coincidence not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work with which I began life, the beginning of its full fruition. Indeed, on this day I can watch almost all the world-movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though then they looked like impracticable dreams, arriving at fruition or on their way to achievement. The first of these dreams was a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India. India today is free but she has not achieved unity... but by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India's future.'

'Another dream was for the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilisation. Asia has arisen; large parts are now quite free or are at this moment being liberated; its other still subject or partly subject parts are moving through whatever struggles towards freedom.'

'The third dream was a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind.'

'A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.'

'Another dream, the spiritual gift of India to the world, has already begun. India's spirituality is entering

Europe and America in an ever-increasing measure.'

'The final dream was a step in evolution which would raise man to higher and larger consciousness and begin the solution of the problems which have perplexed and vexed him since he first began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society.'

XII. IN THE SUBTLE PHYSICAL: THE SUPRAMENTAL DESCENT

On December 5, 1950 at 1.26 a.m. Sri Aurobindo left his physical body, which remained aglow for more than 111 hours, 'surcharged with a concentration of Supramental Light'. He retired physically 'obviously to work things out', that is, trying to get the Supermind down into the material.

The Mother announced: 'The funeral of Sri Aurobindo has not taken place today. His body is charged with such a concentration of Supramental Light that there is no sign of decomposition and the body will be kept lying on his bed so long as it remains intact.'

Other announcements made by The Mother at this time include the following:

'Lord, this morning Thou hast given me the assurance that Thou wouldst stay with us until Thy work is achieved, not only as a consciousness which guides and illumines but also as a dynamic Presence in action. In unmistakable terms Thou hast promised that all of Thyself would remain here and not leave the earth atmosphere until earth is transformed. Grant that we may be worthy of this marvellous Presence and henceforth everything in us be concentrated on the one will to be more and more perfectly consecrated to the fulfilment of Thy sublime work.'

'When I asked him to resuscitate, he clearly answered: "I have left the body purposely. I will not take it back.

I shall manifest again in the first supramental body built in a supramental way."'

'We stand in the Presence of him who has sacrificed his physical life in order to help more fully his work of transformation.'

On December 9, after the Light had begun to depart, the body was laid in a rosewood casket and placed in the Ashram courtyard under the Service Tree. The *samadhi* has become a quiet haven for meditation and realisation for *sadhaks*, and an object of pilgrimage for visitors from all over the world.

'People do not know what a tremendous sacrifice he has made for the world,' said The Mother. 'About a year ago, while I was discussing things I remarked that I felt like leaving this body of mine. He spoke out in a very firm tone: "No, this can never be. If it is necessary for this transformation I might go, you will have to fulfil our Yoga of supramental descent and transformation."'

According to The Mother, Sri Aurobindo has a 'permanent home in the subtle physical (the region close to the earth) where all those who wish to see him can go and see him. There in the subtle physical, his form is similar to the one he had upon earth, but with the splendid peace of immortality.'

The *sadhana* and the work continued on the physical and supra-physical planes. A momentous event occurred six years after Sri Aurobindo had left his body. A rumour was afloat in Sri Aurobindo circles that the year 1956 was going to be a very significant one especially April 23 (23.4.56). The event, however, the long awai-

ted descent of the Supermind, took place two months earlier, on February 29, 1956. The Mother described it as follows:

'This evening, the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was there present among you. I had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine. As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that "the time has come", and lifting with both hands a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow, on the door and the door was shattered to pieces. Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow.' The Mother emphasised on April 24, 1956: 'The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality. It is at work here and one day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling will be obliged to recognise it.' The Mother also gave the following message:

Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute
A new light breaks upon the earth
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.

Four years later, on February 29, 1960, The Mother declared: 'Henceforth the 29th February will be the Day of The Lord.'

Let us recollect what the Master has said: 'What we are doing, if and when we succeed, will be a beginning,

not a completion. It is the foundation of a new consciousness on earth—a consciousness with infinite possibilities of manifestation.'

Once a disciple drew The Mother's attention to what Sri Aurobindo had said—'The Supramental Consciousness will enter into a phase of realising power in 1967'—and asked: 'What does "realising power" exactly mean?' The Mother replied: 'Acting decisively on the mind of men and the course of events.' The conversation continued as follows:

Disciple: 'What is the effect of the realising power on The Mother's own physical being and then the effect upon others and the world in general—including the outstanding problems tof the world today?'

The Mother: 'We can wait with a little patience and we shall see.'

XIII. A SUPRAMENTAL FUTURE

BELOW ARE some short extracts from The Mother's writings which throw light on some aspects of a supramental future.

1958: 'The supramental substance is now almost everywhere spread in earth's atmosphere, preparing for the emergence of intermediaries and supermen — an altogether new creation within the old — and acting on mental man so as to put him in conscious relation with the new creation.'

'The only thing in the world that still appears to me intolerable now consists of all the physical deterioration, the physical sufferings, the ugliness, the inability to express the capacity of beauty that is in every being. But that also will be conquered one day . . . the more one wants to descend into matter, the more must one rise in consciousness.'

'As the beginnings of the supramental life, which is next to be realised in the evolution of the universe, are developing, not perhaps in an apparent but a sure manner, it appears more and more evident that the most difficult means of approach to this supramental life is intellectual activity.'

'There is in this new substance that is spreading and acting in the world, a warmth, a power, and a joy so

intense that all intellectual activity appears by its side cold and dry. And that is why the less one speaks of these things, the better.'

'One single instant, one single surge of deep and true love, one single minute of deep communion in the divine Grace, takes you much nearer to the goal than all possible explanations.'

'One can say even that a kind of sensation that is refined, subtle, clear, luminous, sharp, deeply penetrating opens the door much more to you than the subtlest explanations. And if we push the experience a little further, it seems when you arrive at the work of transformation of the body when some cells of the body, more ready than others, more refined and subtle and plastic, begin to feel concretely the presence of the divine Grace, the divine Will, the divine Power, the knowledge which is not intellectual but knowledge by identity, when you feel this even in the cells of your body, then the experience is so total, so imperative, so living, concrete, real that all the rest appears as a vain dream.'

'It would seem that one never truly understands until one understands with one's body.'

1959: 'By the very fact that you live upon earth at this moment—whether you are conscious of it or not and even whether you wish it or not—you absorb with the air that you breathe this new supramental substance which is spreading in earth's atmosphere and it is preparing in things that will manifest all of a sudden, as soon

as you have taken the decisive step.'

1961: 'Two irrefutable signs prove that one is in relation with the supramental: (i) a perfect and constant equality, (ii) an absolute certainty in the knowledge.

'To be perfect, the equality must be invariable and spontaneous, effortless, towards all circumstances, all happenings, all contacts, material or psychological, irrespective of their character and impact.'

1963: Question: 'Is a direct transmutation, without passing through birth, possible now that the Supramental has come down upon earth?'

Answer: 'Is it possible ? Everything is possible. What do you want to know? Whether that has already been done?'

'Yes.'

Answer: 'Not down to the most material plane; but perceptible to the subtle physical, yes, perceptible by the intermediary senses between the physical senses and the senses of the subtle physical; for example, like a breath that one feels, like a light breeze, like some smell of subtle perfume. Naturally, they only see who have an inner vision. But to the most material senses they have not the permanence given by the physical body as we know it materially. There are phenomena yes, even vision, but of a passing nature. It is the stability of matter, its fixity that is not obtained.'

1965: 'Vivekananda is said to be an incarnation (*vibhuti*) of Shiva; but Shiva clearly expressed his will to come upon earth only with the supramental world. He will

come when the earth will be ready for the supramental life. And almost all these beings will manifest themselves—they are waiting for that moment. They do not want the struggle and the obscurity of the present.'

1966: 'People are in a hurry, they want to see the results immediately. And then they believe they are pulling down the Supramental—they pull down some small vital individuality who plays with them and in the end makes them do some ugly farce.'

'But the true Power, the Power which Sri Aurobindo calls "supramental", can never be manifested unless you are absolutely free from all egoism in all its forms. So there is no danger of its being misused. It will not manifest except through a being who has attained to perfection the complete inner detachment. I have told you that this is what Sri Aurobindo expects us to do—you may tell me that it is difficult, but I repeat, we are not here to do easy things, we are here to do difficult things.'

1968: 'Powerful and prolonged infiltration of supramental forces into the body, everywhere at the same time, as though the whole body bathed in the forces that entered everywhere at the same time with a slight friction, the head down to the neck was the least receptive region.' (The Mother wrote this in a note dated November 26/27, 1968)

1969: 'On the 1st January 1969 at two o'clock in the morning, a Consciousness descended into the earth's atmosphere and settled there. It was a most marvellous descent, full of light, force, power, joy and peace and

suffused the whole earth.'

'Since the beginning of this year a new consciousness is at work upon earth to prepare man for a new creation, the Superman. For this creation to be possible the substance that constitutes man's body must undergo a big change. It must become more receptive to the consciousness and more plastic under its working.'

'In the supramental creation there will no more be religions. All life will be the expression, the flowering in forms of the Divine Unity manifesting in the world. And there will be no more what men now call the gods. These great divine beings themselves will be able to participate in the new creation, but for that they must put on what we may call the supramental substance on earth. And if there are some who choose to remain in their world, as they are, if they decide not to manifest themselves physically, their relation with the other beings of the supramental world on earth will be a relation of friends, of collaborators, of equal to equal, because the highest divine essence will have manifested in the beings of the new supramental world on earth.'

'When the physical substance will be supramentalised, to be born on earth in a body will not be a cause of inferiority rather the contrary, there will be gained a plenitude which could not be obtained otherwise.'

'All that is of the future, a future that has begun but will take some time before realising itself integrally. In the meanwhile, we are in a very special situation, extremely special, which has had no precedent. We are attending on the birth of a new world, altogether young,

altogether weak—weak not in its essence, but in its external manifestation—not yet recognised, not yet felt, denied by most; but it is there, it is there endeavouring to grow and quite sure of the result. Yet the road to reach there is a new road that has never before been traced; none went by that way, none did that. It is a beginning, a universal beginning. Therefore it is an adventure absolutely unexpected and unforeseeable.'

XIV. THE MASTER AND THE GUIDE

'TEACHING, EXAMPLE, INFLUENCE'— these are the three instruments of the *guru, Sri Aurobindo.*

A letter from Sri Aurobindo to Barin, his youngest brother, written on April 7, 1920 throws some light on the position of a *guru*: 'First about your Yoga. You wish to give me the charge of your Yoga, and I am willing to take it, that is to say, to give it to Him who is moving by his divine *shakti* both you and myself whether secretly or openly. But you must know the necessary result will be that you will have to follow that special way which He has given to me which I call Integral Yoga.'

Sri Aurobindo also explained on another occasion: 'The Master is one who has risen to a higher consciousness and being and he is often regarded as its manifestation or representative. He not only helps by his teaching and still more by his influence and example, but by a power to communicate his own experience to others.'

The Mother's role in spiritual guidance is the same as Sri Aurobindo's. 'Nothing can be done without her knowledge and force, without her consciousness,' says Sri Aurobindo. 'If anybody really feels her consciousness, he should know that I am there behind it and if he feels me, it is the same with hers.'

In all yogic disciplines, and more so in Integral Yoga, the inspiration of the Master and, in the difficult stages, his control and his presence, are indispensable. It would be impossible otherwise to go through it without much stumbling and error which might prevent all chance of success. So far as Sri Aurobindo is concerned, his corres-

pondence and evening talks reveal only in an infinitesimal way how he helped and guided his disciples. His help was mostly through inner communication and inner action.

Sri Aurobindo has said that 'the *guru*...is a man helping his brothers, a child leading children, a light kindling other lights, an awakened Soul awakening souls...' This is what he was doing all the time. He laid before his disciples all the difficulties of the path.

He explained in one of his letters: 'The way of Yoga here has a different purpose from others, for its aim is not only to rise out of the ordinary ignorant world-consciousness, but to bring the supramental power of that divine consciousness down into the ignorance of mind, life and body to transform them, to manifest the Divine here and create a divine Life in Matter. This is an exceedingly difficult aim and difficult yoga; to many or most it will seem impossible. All the established forces of the ordinary ignorant world-consciousness are opposed to it and deny it and try to prevent it, and the *sadhak* will find his own mind, life and body full of the most obstinate impediments to its realisation. If you can accept the ideal wholeheartedly, face all the difficulties, leave the past and its ties behind you and are ready to give up everything and risk everything for this divine possibility, then only can you hope to discover by experience the Truth behind it.

'The *sadhana* of this Yoga does not proceed through any set mental teaching or prescribed forms of meditation, *mantras* or others, but by aspiration, by a self-concentration inwards or upwards, by self-opening to an influence, to the Divine Power above us and its workings, to the Divine

Presence in the heart and by the rejection of all that is foreign to these things. It is only by faith, aspiration and surrender that this self-opening can come.'

It was a terrestrial realisation that Sri Aurobindo sought. He wanted a divine conquest of this world, the conquest of all its movements and the realisation of the Divine here. His own realisation was only a key for opening the gates of the supramental to the earth consciousness. What should the individual disciple do to collaborate in this great task? He explains the *sadhana:* '*Sadhana* is the opening of the consciousness to the Divine, the change of the present consciousness to the psychic and spiritual consciousness. In this Yoga it means also the offering of all the consciousness and its activities to the Divine for possession and use by the Divine and for transformation.' And in another context: 'The true way to enter into these things is to still the mind and open to the consciousness from which things are done. Then you would first have a direct experience of the way the Divine Consciousness acts on different planes and secondly a light of knowledge about the experience. This is the only true way — all the rest is only words and sterile mental logic.'

He also helped his disciples in their literary and other activities. Their latent faculties grew under the pressure of his force and people flowered into dramatists, poets, painters, etc., almost as if by a miracle. He explained the process in one of his letters: 'Yes, of course, I have been helping J. When somebody wants, really, to develop the literary power, I put some force to help him or her. If there is faculty and application, however latent the faculty, it always grows under the pressure and can even be turned in this or that direction. Naturally, some are more

favourable *adharas* than others and grow more decisively and quickly. Others drop off, not having the necessary power of application. But, on the whole, it is easy enough to make this faculty grow if there is co-operation on the part of the recipient and only the *tamas* of the *apravritti* (urge for action) and *aprakas* (absence of light) in the human mind are to be overcome which are not as serious obstacles in the things of the human mind as vital resistance or non-cooperation of the will or ideas which confront one when there is a pressure or progress in other directions.'

Here is another letter from Sri Aurobindo to a disciple explaining how writing—or as a matter of fact, any work—can become Yoga: 'If it is your aim to write from the Divine and for the Divine—you should then try to make all equally a pure transcription from the inner source and where the inspiration fails return upon your work to make the whole worthy of its origin and its object. All work done for the Divine, from poetry and art and music to carpentry or baking or sweeping a room, should be made perfect even in its smallest external detail as well as in the spirit in which it is done; for only then is it an altogether fit offering.'

In Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, work is an integral part of *sadhana*. He once stated: 'Those who do work for the Mother in all sincerity are prepared by the work itself for the right consciousness even if they do not sit down for meditation or follow any particular practice of Yoga.'

In reply to a question whether those who live in peace and *samata* (equanimity) but do no work for The Mother or do little work get transformation, Sri Aurobindo replied categorically: 'No, they do not get transformed at all.'

The *guru* himself should provide an example of what he wants his disciples to do or become. The Mother has mentioned an interesting incident concerning Sri Aurobindo: '...the thing is to hold the true consciousness in the body itself and not to have the least fear and be full of the divine peace. Then indeed there is no danger. Not only can attacks of man be warned off, but beasts also and even the elements can be affected. I can give you a little example. You remember the night of the great cyclone, when there was a tremendous noise and splash of rain all about the place, I thought I would go to Sri Aurobindo's room and help him shut the windows. I just opened his door and found him sitting quietly at his desk, writing. There was such a solid peace in the room that nobody would have dreamed that a cyclone was raging outside. All the windows were wide open, not a drop of rain was coming inside.'

Thousands of letters asking all sorts of questions covering all sorts of problems, inner and outer, which appeared baffling and insurmountable, were addressed to Sri Aurobindo. And he responded both inwardly and outwardly. Every reply also carried a force for help and transformation. A few are quoted here:

To a disciple who was feeling strain and fatigue in his work: 'Think of your work only when it is being done, not before and not after. Do not let your mind go back to a work that is finished. It belongs to the past and all re-handling of it is a waste of power. Do not let your mind labour in anticipation of a work that has to be done. The power that acts in you will see to it in its own time.

'These two habits of the mind belong to a past functioning that the transforming force is pressing to remove and the physical mind's persistence in them is the cause of

your strain and fatigue. If you can remember to let your mind work only when its action is needed, the strain will lessen and disappear. This is indeed the transitional movement before the supramental working takes possession of the physical mind and brings into it the spontaneous action of the light.'

Yet another disciple turned to Sri Aurobindo because he was finding it very difficult to get rid of wrong movements in himself. Sri Aurobindo answered: 'In your dealing with your difficulties and the wrong movements that assail you, you are probably making the mistake of identifying yourself with them too much and regarding them as part of your own nature. You should rather draw back from them, detach and dissociate yourself from them, regard them as movements of the universal lower imperfect and impure nature, forces that enter into you and try to make you their instrument for their self-expression. By so detaching and dissociating yourself, it will be more possible for you to discover and to live more and more in a part of yourself, your inner and your psychic being, which is not attacked or troubled by these movements, finds them foreign to itself and automatically refuses assent to them and feels itself always turned to or in contact with the divine forces and the higher planes of consciousness. Find that part of your being and live in it; to be able to do so is the true foundation of the Yoga.'

What exactly was the role of the hostile forces, why were they permitted to create difficulties for the *sadhaks*? asked another disciple. Sri Aurobindo replied: 'The hostile forces have a certain self-chosen function: it is to test the condition of the individual, of the work, of the earth itself and their readiness for the spiritual descent and ful-

filment. At every step of the journey, they are there attacking furiously, criticising, suggesting, imposing despondency or inciting to revolt, raising unbelief, amassing difficulties. No doubt they put a very exaggerated interpretation of the rights given them by their function, making mountains even out of what to us is a mole-hill. A little trifling false step or mistake and they appear on the road and clap a whole Himalaya as a barrier across it. But this opposition has been permitted from of old not merely as a test or ordeal, but as a compulsion on us to seek a greater strength, a more perfect self-knowledge, an intenser purity and force of aspiration, a faith that nothing can crush, a more powerful descent of the Divine Grace.'

He warned another: 'Passivity of the mind is good, but take care to be passive only to the Truth and to the touch of the Divine *shakti*. If you are passive to the suggestions and influences of the lower nature, you will not be able to progress or else you will expose yourself to adverse forces which may take you far away from the true path of yoga.'

A disciple had already realised calm, peace and surrender, but was finding it difficult to retain them while working. He placed his difficulties before Sri Aurobindo. The reply came: 'At last you have the true foundation of the *sadhana*. This calm, peace and surrender are the right atmosphere for all the rest to come, knowledge, strength, *ananda*. Let it become complete. It does not remain when engaged in work because it is still confined to the mind proper which has only just received the gift of silence. When the new consciousness is fully formed and has taken entire possession of the vital nature and the physical being (the vital as yet is only touched or domi-

nated by the silence, not possessed by it), then this defect will disappear.

'The quiet consciousness of peace you now have in the mind must become not only calm but wide. You must feel it everywhere, yourself in it and all in it. This also will help to bring the calm as a basis into the action.

'The wider your consciousness becomes, the more you will be able to receive from above. The *shakti* will be able to descend and bring strength and light as well as peace into the system. What you feel as narrow and limited in you is the physical mind; it can only widen if this wider consciousness and the light come down and possess the nature.

'The physical inertia from which you suffer is likely to lessen and disappear only when strength from above descends into the system.

'Remain quiet, open yourself and call the divine *shakti* to confirm the calm and peace, to widen the consciousness and to bring into it as much light and power as it can at present receive and assimilate.

'Take care not to be over-eager, as this may disturb again such quiet and balance as has been already established in the vital nature. Have confidence in the final result and give time for the Power to do its work.'

Another disciple had transgressed in some way and came to Sri Aurobindo seeking his advice on reparation. His letter quoted below explains the true *prayaschitta* (more concentration on the Divine):

'You ask how you can repair the wrong you seem to have done. Admitting that it is as you say, it seems to me that the reparation lies precisely in this, in making yourself a vessel for the Divine Truth, and the Divine Love.

And the first steps towards that are a complete self-consecration and self-purification, a complete opening of oneself to the Divine, rejecting all in oneself that can stand in the way of the fulfilment. In the spiritual life there is no other reparation for any mistake, none that is wholly effective. At the beginning one should not ask for any other fruit or results than this internal growth and change—for otherwise one lays oneself open to severe disappointments. Only when one is free, can one free others and in Yoga it is out of the inner victory that there comes the outer conquest.'

Sri Aurobindo, though he never imposed himself on anyone, guided in all matters. Here is a letter typical of his guidance to a disciple who prayed for his views on marriage: '...everything depends on your ideal. If it is to lead the ordinary life of vital and physical enjoyments, you can choose your mate anywhere you like. If it is a nobler ideal like that of art or music or service to your country, the seeking for a life-companion must be determined not by desire, but by something higher and the woman must have something in her attuned to the psychic part of your being. If your ideal is spiritual life, you must think fifty times before you marry...with these data before you, you must decide for yourself.'

The disciples, the more they did the *sadhana*, the more they became conscious of the unregenerate parts of their natures. They came from several countries, various religions and each naturally brought a *swabhava* (nature) of his own. Each had his own potentialities and difficulties and had to be tackled individually. One disciple tried to fast in order to conquer his desires, but was not successful. The problem was referred to Sri Aurobindo. Came

the answer: 'All the ordinary vital movements are foreign to the true being and come from outside; they do not belong to the soul nor do they originate in it but are waves from the general Nature, *prakriti*.

'The desires come from outside, enter the subconscious and rise to the surface. It is only when they rise to the surface and the mind becomes aware of them, that we become conscious of the desire. It seems to us to be our own because we feel it thus rising from the vital into the mind and do not know that it came from outside. What belongs to the vital, to the being, what makes it responsible is not the desire itself, but the habit of responding to the waves or the currents of suggestion that come into it from the universal *prakriti*.'

A disciple asked him: 'I saw what you wrote to X about reading. I wonder if it applies to me also?' Sri Aurobindo replied: 'What is written for X is not meant for you. He has got into a movement of consciousness in which reading is no longer necessary and would rather interfere with his consciousness. There is no objection to your reading provided it does not interfere with your meditation.'

The same disciple again wrote to him: 'I have such a push to write poetry, stories, all kinds of things, in Bengali.' To which Sri Aurobindo answered: 'Ambitions of that kind are too vague to succeed. You have to limit your fields and concentrate in order to succeed in them. I don't make any attempt to be a scientist or painter or general. I have certain things to do and have done them, so long as the Divine wanted; others have opened in me from above or within by Yoga. I have done as much of them as the Divine wanted. X has had dynamisms and

followed them so long as they were there or so often as they were there. You mentalise, mentalise, discuss, discuss, hesitate and hesitate... There is no incompatibility between spirituality and creative activity — they can be united. Fluctuating of course comes in the way of action and therefore of success. One can do one or other or one can do both, but not fluctuate eternally.'

There were often questions concerning illness. A disciple asked: 'But what about diseases. Can yoga cure all of them?' Sri Aurobindo answered: 'Of course I can, but on condition of faith or openness or both. Even a mental suggestion can cure cancer—with luck of course—as is shown by the case of the woman operated on unsuccessfully for cancer, but the doctors lied and told her it had succeeded. Result, cancer symptoms all ceased and she died many years afterwards of another illness altogether.' This disciple, a doctor himself, was witnessing the force of Sri Aurobindo working out on a patient and wrote: 'We all believe that as soon as you read our letters, we receive the necessary help. Yesterday when I went to R to treat his eye, he told me that he felt your force working inside it, and inferred that you were reading his letter just then.' Sri Aurobindo wrote back: 'It depends on how far the inner being is awake—otherwise one needs a physical *avalambana* (support). There are some people who get the relief only after we read a letter, others get it immediately they write or before it has reached us or after it has reached but before we have read. Others get it simply by referring the whole matter to us mentally.'

The same doctor asked again: 'You have said that one can know of illnesses before they enter the body;

in that case can one always stop them and have absolute immunity?' Sri Aurobindo wrote: 'All illnesses pass through the nervous or vital-physical sheath of the subtle consciousness and subtle body before they enter the physical. If one is conscious of the subtle body or with the subtle consciousness, one can stop an illness on its way and prevent it from entering the physical body. But it may come without one's noticing, or when one is asleep or through the subconscience, or in a sudden rush when one is off one's guard; then there is nothing to do but fight it out from a hold gained on the body. Self-defence by these inner means may become so strong that the body becomes practically immune and many yogis are. Still this "practically" does not mean "absolutely". The absolute immunity can only come with the supramental change. For below the supramental it is the result of an action of a force among many forces and can be disturbed by a disruption of the equilibrium established—in the supramental it is a law of the nature; in a supramentalised body immunity from illness would be automatic, inherent in its new nature.'

Sri Aurobindo was informed: 'It seems that people are now depending more on doctors and medicines than before.' His answer: 'Increase of numbers brought in all sorts of influences that were not there in the smaller circle before. Doctors did not matter so long as faith was the main thing and a little treatment the help. But when faith went, illnesses increased and the doctors became not merely useful but indispenable. There was also the third cause, the descent of the *sadhana* into the physical consciousness with all its doubt, obscurity and resistance. To eliminate all that is no longer possible.'

Sri Aurobindo encouraged his disciples to put their self-observation before him. He wrote: 'It is necessary for you to be conscious and put your self-observation before us; it is on that that we can act. It is an undoubted fact proved by hundreds of instances that for many the exact statement of their difficulties to us is the best and often, though not always, an immediate, even an instantaneous means of release.'

A disciple found the action of the force sent to liberate him too much and the *guru* had to console him: 'We are sorry you had to suffer so much. It was not to hurt you that The Mother put the pressure, but to liberate.'

Another received encouragement as follows: 'The things you see are mostly indications of a working that is going on inside you; there is no fear that they will be merely visions without effect on the consciousness. Already your consciousness has changed much and yet it is only a beginning of the still greater change that is to come.'

Sri Aurobindo explained his guidance: 'I never point out to anybody his defects unless he gives me the occasion. A *sadhak* must become conscious and lay himself before the Light, see and reject and change. It is not the right method for us to interfere and lecture and point out this and point out that. That is the school-master method—it does not work in the spiritual change.'

Brahmacharya is one of the important aspects of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. Here are extracts from his letters on the transformation of the sex-centre: 'The transformation of the sex-centre and its energy is needed for the physical *siddhi*; for this is the support in the body of all the mental, vital and physical forces of the nature. It has to be changed into a mass and a movement of inti-

mate Light, creative Power, pure divine *ananda*. It is only the bringing down of the supramental Light, Power and Bliss into the centre that can change it. As to the working afterwards, it is the supramental Truth and the creative vision and will of the Divine Mother that will determine it. But it will be a working of the conscious Truth, not of the darkness and ignorance to which sexual desire and enjoyment belong; it will be a power of preservation and free desireless radiation of the life-forces and not of their throwing out and waste. Avoid the imagination that the supramental life will be only a heightened satisfaction of the desires of the vital and the body; nothing can be a greater obstacle to the Truth in its descent than this hope of glorification of the animal in the human nature. Mind wants the supramental state to be a confirmation of its own cherished ideas and preconceptions; the vital wants it to be a glorification of its own desires; the physical wants it to be a rich prolongation of its own comforts and pleasures and habits. If it were to be that, it would be only an exaggerated and highly magnified consummation of the animal and the human nature, not a transition from the human into the Divine.

'*Pranayama* and other physical practices like *asanas* do not necessarily root out sexual desire—sometimes by increasing enormously the vital force in the body they can even exaggerate in a rather startling way the force too of the sexual tendency, which, being at the base of the physical life, is always difficult to conquer. The one thing to do is to separate oneself from these movements, to find one's inner self and live in it. These movements will not then any longer appear as belonging to oneself but as surface impositions of the outer *prakriti* upon the

inner self or *purusha*. They can then be more easily discarded or brought to nothing.'

Sleep and dreams also came under his illuminating guidance: 'If one learns how to interpret,' he wrote, 'one can get from dreams much knowledge of the secrets of our nature and of other nature.'

How does the *guru* communicate during *darshan*? Explaining this, Sri Aurobindo said of the Mother: 'The Mother gives in both ways. Through the eyes it is to the psychic, through the hand to the material.' The Mother used to give flowers [to about 400 varieties of which she has given a specific spiritual significance] to the disciples when they came to her to offer their *pranams*. Sri Aurobindo explained the significance of the giving of flowers by The Mother: 'It is meant to help the realisation of the thing the flower stands for.'

Speaking of her relationship with the disciples, The Mother has said: 'There is a special personal tie between you and me, between all who have turned to Sri Aurobindo and my teachings—it is well understood that distance does not count here, you may be in France, you may be at the other end of the world or at Pondicherry, the tie is always true and living. With those whom I have accepted as disciples, to whom I have said "yes" there is more than a tie, there is an emanation of me. In fact, I hold myself responsible for everyone, even for those whom I have met only for one second in my life.'

And in another context: 'Mastery means to know how to deal with certain vibrations... To master something, a movement for example, means, by your simple presence, without any word, any explanation, to replace a bad vibration by the true one. By means of the word, by

means of explanation and discussion, even a certain emanation of force, you exert an influence upon another, but you do not master the movement. Mastery over a movement is the capacity to set against the vibration of the movement a stronger, truer vibration that can stop the other vibration.

'If words are necessary to explain a certain thing, then you have not the true knowledge. If I have to speak out all that I mean to say in order to make you understand, then I have not the mastery, I simply exercise an influence upon your intelligence and help you to understand, awaken in you the desire to know, to discipline yourself, etc. But if I am not able, simply by looking at you, without saying anything, to make you enter into the Light that will make you understand, well, I have not mastered the state of ignorance.'

XV. THE WRITINGS OF SRI AUROBINDO

THREE ASPECTS STAND OUT as common factors in all the writings of Sri Aurobindo: his great command of the English language; the inspiration through a silent mind after January 1908; and his integral or spiritual approach to everything. As far as the variety of subjects covered is concerned, he proved his theory that a Yogi can turn his hand to anything. His writings are a constant inspiration, whether on matters political or spiritual, in prose or in verse.

'A Yogi who writes is not a literary man for he writes only what the inner Will and Word want him to express,' says Sri Aurobindo. This can be said of all his writings. 'All things are possible in Yoga,' as the Master himself said. 'I am supposed to be a philosopher, but I never studied philosophy; everything I wrote came from Yogic experience, knowledge and inspiration. So too my great power over poetry and perfect expression was acquired in these last days, not by reading and seeing how other people wrote, but from the heightening of my consciousness and the greater inspiration that came from the heightening.'

Sri Aurobindo's early political writings and speeches comprise *New Lamps for Old*, published in 1893 in the *Induprakash*; the *Bhawani Mandir Scheme*; over one hundred editorials in the *Bande Mataram*, published between 1906 and 1908; his writings in *Dharma and Karma Yogin*, published in 1909-10, *Uttarpara* and other speeches and his comment on the *Montague-Chelmsford Reforms* after he came



Plate 10 — Young Aurovillians working at the site of the Matrimandir—The Mother's temple—in Auroville



Plate 11 — 1968. At the fou



on ceremony of Auroville

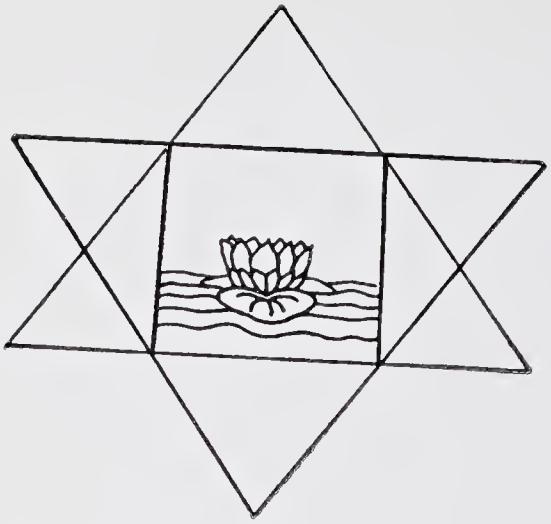


Fig. 1 — Sri Aurobindo's symbol



Fig. 2 — The Mother's symbol

to Pondicherry. These writings and speeches are characterised by his insistence on complete independence for India as a goal: 'India must be free not only for herself but for the sake of the world,' he said. To him *swaraj* was the fulfilment of the ancient life of India under modern conditions, the return of *satyajuga* (age of Truth) of national greatness, the resumption by her of her great role of teacher and guide, the self-liberation of the people for the final fulfilment of the Vedantic ideal in politics, this is the true *swaraj* for India... She cannot do it without taking the management of her own life in her own hands. She must live her own life as an independent entity, not as a part or subordinate in an alien empire.' He indicated clearly the lines along which the struggle for independence should proceed—on one side passive resistance, boycott non-cooperation, rural reconstruction and national education and on the other a preparation for an armed revolt, if necessary. These early writings were also characterised by a clear and true vision of the great past of India and a faith in its greater future.

The ideas expressed in his writings are as true and as inspiring today as they were in 1906. He wrote on March 28, 1908: 'We are Hindus and naturally spiritual in our temperament, because the work which we have to do for *humanity* is a work which no other nation can accomplish, the spiritualisation of the race...' One of his editorials in the *Bande Mataram* of April 24, 1908 explains his approach to politics: 'There are two things which seem to us to distinguish the new from the old school of Indian politics: first its intense realism and second its fervent spirituality.'

Sri Aurobindo's major works on spiritual philosophy,

yoga, culture, the Vedas, the *Gita* and other subjects were first serialised in the *Arya* and were later revised and published as separate volumes. His writings radiate a realism, at once rational and transcendental, brought about by the unification of intellectual and scientific disciplines with those of intuitive experience. These writings are the result of his studies and meditations and they not only present a comprehensive view of the highest problems of existence and firmly foresee the future possibilities, but also provide concrete guidance on spiritual development (Integral Yoga), on the evolution of a spiritualised society and a realisation of human unity in diversity.

'To grow into the fulness of the Divine is the true law of human life and to shape man's earthly existence into its image is the meaning of evolution.' This is the fundamental tenet of the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. In *The Life Divine*, his *magnum opus*, Sri Aurobindo starts from the Vedantic position, its ideas of the Self, mind and life, *sachchidananda* and the world of Knowledge and Ignorance, rebirth and the Spirit. He has attempted to establish from its data a comprehensive *Adwaita*. He has shown that mind and life and matter are derivations from the Self through a spiritual mind or supermind which is the real support of cosmic existence. By developing mind into supermind man can arrive at the real truth of the spirit in the world and the real truth and highest law of life. The Self is *sachchidananda* and there is no incurable antinomy between that and the world. Only we see the world through the eyes of Ignorance and we have to see it through the eyes of knowledge. Our Ignorance itself is only knowledge developing out of its in-

volution in the apparent conscience of matter and on its way to a return to its conscious integrality. To accomplish that return and manifest the spiritual life in the human existence is the opportunity given by the successions of rebirth. He accepts the truth of evolution, not so much in the physical form given to it by the West as in its philosophical truth, the involution of life and mind and spirit here in matter and their progressive manifestation. At the summit of this evolution is the spiritual life and the life divine.

In *On The Veda*, Sri Aurobindo has revealed the secret of the symbols in the Vedas and has removed the obscurity cast on them by the rituals.

His *Essays on the Gita* is a luminous interpretation of the *Bhagavad Gita*. It treats it as a powerful application of the truth of spirit to the largest and most difficult part of the truth of life, to action and a way by which action can lead us to birth into the spirit and can be harmonised with the spiritual life. The real soul and self of us is hidden from our intelligence by its ignorance of the inner things, by a false identification, by an absorption in our outward mechanism of mind, life and body. But if the active soul of man can once draw back from this identification with its natural instruments, if it can see and live in the entire faith of its inner reality, then all is changed, life and existence take on another appearance, action a different meaning and character. Our being then becomes no longer this little egoistic creation of Nature, but the largeness of a divine, immortal and spiritual Power. Our consciousness becomes no longer that of this limited and struggling mental and vital creature, but an infinite, divine and spiritual consciousness.

Our will and action too are no longer that of this bounded personality and its ego, but a divine and spiritual will and action, the will and power of the universal, the Supreme, the All-Self and Spirit acting freely through the human figure.

In the *Synthesis of Yoga* Sri Aurobindo has tried to present a comprehensive view of the principles and methods of the various lines of spiritual self-discipline and the way in which they can lead to an integral divine life in the human existence.

In the *Ideal of Human Unity* he has taken the present trend of mankind towards a closer unification and tried to appreciate its tendencies and show what is wanting in them in order that real human unity may be achieved.

In *The Human Cycle*, originally published under the title *Psychology of Social Development*, he has shown how the future society can be and will be a spiritualised society. Sri Aurobindo's social philosophy is a part of his spiritual philosophy.

Sri Aurobindo's letters to his disciples form a very important part of Aurobindonian literature. He received thousands of letters and a very large portion of his time was devoted to answering them. They cover almost every subject which touches human life—God, Nature, man, planes and parts of the being, maditation, Hathayoga, the Tantras, sleep and dreams, mind, intuition, illness, visions, art, literature, work as *sadhana*, occult knowledge, *brahmacharya*, food, destiny, *karma*, rebirth, literary criticisms, culture, world affairs, social problems, guidance in writing poetry, money, supramental transformation, etc. His philosophy of "All life is Yoga" includes all activities in its integral vision.

In *The Foundations of Indian Culture* Sri Aurobindo touches on the spirit, the soul of India behind its religion, art, architecture, sculpture, education, polity, etc., and shows how the culture of India is an expression of its spirit and ends by saying: 'We cannot be ourselves alone in any narrow formal sense, because we must necessarily take account of the modern world around us, and get free knowledge of it, otherwise we cannot live.'

'We must look at each province of culture and, keeping always a firm hold on what the Indian spirit is and the Indian ideal is, see how they can work upon the present situation and possibilities in each of these provinces and lead to a new victorious creation.'

Sri Aurobindo's shorter writings, such as *The Mother*, *The Hour of God*, *The Problem of Rebirth*, etc., also shed the light of the Aurobindonian consciousness on a variety of problems and subjects. One has to read them in order to realise the perfection of expression in every sense of the word. They light the fire within, open a sky as it were, and bring the effective vision of that of which the word is a body.

In his book *The Future Poetry* Sri Aurobindo explains: '. . .in moments of supreme elevation, poetry in the past had tried to express the Divine reality behind the creation, but in the future there seems to be some chance of making it a more conscious aim and steadfast endeavour. The poetry of the future has to solve the problem of the utterance of the deepest soul of man and of the universal spirit in things. It has to find the inspiring aesthetic form and the revealing language for this vision and experience. The essential and decisive stuff of the future art of poetry will perhaps be to discover that it is not the form which

either fixes or reveals the spirit but the spirit which makes out of itself the form and the word.'

Savitri, a legend and a symbol, was Sri Aurobindo's latest and greatest poem. Its 23,800 lines of blank verse make it the longest epic in English literature. Sri Aurobindo described it as '. . . a new mystical poetry with a new vision and expression of things. . .' He said: 'I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I re-wrote from that level. Moreover, I was particular—if (a) part seemed to me to come from any lower levels I was not satisfied to leave it because it was good poetry. All had to be as far as possible of the same mint. In fact *Savitri* has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one's own yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative.' And again: '*Savitri* is the record of seeing, of an experience which is not of the common kind.'

Indeed *Savitri* is the supreme Knowledge, above all philosophy, all religions of man. It is a spiritual way, it is yoga, *tapasya*, *sadhana*—everything is in its single self. *Savitri* has extraordinary power, it gives out vibrations to him who can receive them, the true vibrations of each stage of consciousness. It is truth in its plenitude, the truth Sri Aurobindo brought down to earth.

Sri Aurobindo reveals for us in this epic a prophetic message, if we can but find it. It is, in fact, a revelation. It is a meditation, a quest for the Infinite, the Eternal. If it is read with the right aspiration, the reading itself will serve as a guide to immortality. One can find there all that is needed to realise the Divine. Each step of

yoga is found there, including, too, all other yogas. It has been said that if one sincerely follows what is revealed in each verse, one will surely reach the transformation of the supramental Yoga—and without a *guru*. It is the infallible guide. Everything is there—mysticism, occultism, philosophy, the history of evolution, the history of man, of the gods, of creation, of Nature; how the universe was created, for what purpose, for what destiny. All is there, you can find all the answers to all your questions. Everything is explained—much that nobody yet knows—if only you have the ability to discover it.

Here are two quotations from *Savitri*:

A magic leverage suddenly is caught
That moves the veiled Ineffable's timeless will:
A prayer, a master act, a kind idea
Can link man's strength to a transcendent Force.
Then miracle is made the common rule,
One mighty deed can change the course of things;
A lonely thought becomes omnipotent.

There the perfection born from eternity
Calls to it the perfection born in Time,
The truth of God surprising human life,
The image of God overtaking finite shapes.
There is a world of everlasting Light,
In the realms of the immortal Supermind
Truth who hides here her head in mystery,
Her riddle deemed by reason impossible
In the stark structure of material form,
Unenigmated lives, unmasked her face and there
Is Nature and the common law of things.

There is a body made of spirit stuff,
The hearth-stone of the Everlasting Fire,
Action translates the movements of the soul,
Thought steps infallible and absolute
And life is a continual worship rite,
A sacrifice of rapture to the One.
A cosmic vision, a spiritual sense
Feels all the Infinite lodged in finite form
And seen through a quivering ecstasy of light
Discovers the bright face of the Bodiless,
In the truth of a moment, in the moment's soul
Can sip the honey-wine of Eternity.

Among Sri Aurobindo's early poems are *The Songs to Myrtilla*, written at the age of 18 when he was in England. These were written in 1890-92. Most of his early twenty-four poems were published in *Collected Poems and Plays* and were written between 1905 and 1910, some in Pondicherry. *Ilion*, an epic in quantitative hexameter is built on the theme of the battles between Achilles, the Greek terror, and Penthisilea, the Amazonian queen.

Sri Aurobindo also translated into English a number of poems and plays written in Sanskrit and Bengali. The most notable of these translated from the Sanskrit were Kalidasa's play *Vikramorvasie* (The Hero and the Nymph), and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* from the Vedas.

The dramas written by Sri Aurobindo must not be forgotten. Four of these, all in blank verse, are set in different countries—ancient Greece, Syria, Persia and Iraq. One play, *Vasavadutta*, as its Sanskrit name denotes, has an ancient Indian setting, the period being after the Mahabharat war. All these plays point to the Divine

Consciousness controlling events and they bring out a silent urge towards harmony and immortality.

As a literary critic, Sri Aurobindo had illuminating observations to make on such diverse figures as Goethe, Shakespeare, Homer, Wordsworth, Valmiki, Dante, Kalidasa, Aeschylus, Virgil, Milton, Sophocles, Vyasa and a host of others.

In the writings of Sri Aurobindo the past, the present and the future, the Divine and the creation, all become integrated in an experience and expression of an integrated consciousness. They are the boons of the Supreme to humanity.

XVI. THE SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

THE MOTHER once said: 'My aim is to create a big family in which it will be possible for everyone fully to develop his capacities and express them.'

The Ashram is a natural and growing expression of the ideals of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. When Sri Aurobindo first came to Pondicherry in 1910 some of his young political associates came with him and they lived together as one household. With the passing years they were joined by other spiritual seekers. It was not until 1920, however, after the Mother's final arrival, that numbers began to increase and the beginnings of a collective life became possible. The actual Ashram, it may be remembered, took shape after November 24, 1926 when Sri Aurobindo put the disciples into The Mother's charge.

An *ashram* in India is usually a spiritual or religious community whose members, gathered around a *guru*, have renounced the world in order to devote themselves to a spiritual life. Apart from the fact that the disciples were gathered first round Sri Aurobindo and later round The Mother, this definition does not fit the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. 'This Ashram has been created...not for the renunciation of the world,' said Sri Aurobindo, 'but as a centre and a field of practice for the evolution of another kind and form of life.'

Before ever he thought of founding an Ashram, before his arrest in Bengal, Sri Aurobindo affirmed: 'The spiritual life finds its most potent expression in the man who

lives the ordinary life of men in the strength of the Yoga. . . It is by such a union of the inner life and the outer that mankind will eventually be lifted up and become mighty and divine.'

The Ashram then is a place where the ordinary every-day life is an integral part of the spiritual life. The 1,600 members of the Ashram, of all nationalities and from all walks of life, are not *sannyasis*, or ascetics, but *sadhaks*, seekers and aspirants, their ideal being the attainment of the life divine here on earth and in the earthly existence. Only those are accepted who, in the judgment of The Mother, have an inner call for the Divine. Sri Aurobindo once explained: 'We receive alike rich and poor, those who are high-born or low-born, according to human standards, and extend to them an equal love and protection.'

The Ashram has grown steadily since 1920. Besides the main buildings where The Mother lives and where Sri Aurobindo's *samadhi* is to be found, the Ashram owns buildings scattered all over the town of Pondicherry and its outskirts. Answering a question as to what were the Ashram precincts, Sri Aurobindo said: 'Every house in which the *sadhaks* of the Ashram live is in the Ashram precincts.'

Some, when they first come to the Ashram, especially Westerners, are disappointed. Nobody helps them to learn anything, there are no classes, lectures or teaching, except the words of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, which are available to all. The would-be disciple must find out everything for himself in the midst of an extremely active life. He is left to himself. There are no protecting walls, except the inner light.

The Ashram has been described as a vast laboratory—this was how Sri Aurobindo described it—which takes in all levels of evolution, mental, vital and psychic. All human types are represented and all traditions. Some *sadhaks* have been brought up in Hinduism, others in Islam, Christianity, Taoism, Buddhism, atheism, etc. And all are at different stages of evolution. Each must find his own truth and it may not be the same as his neighbour's. In spite of what Sri Aurobindo has said, some believe in ascetism and live in retirement.

Most *sadhaks* work and there is work to suit every taste. You can be a teacher in the International Centre of Education, which ranges from kindergarten to university level; or you can lend a helping hand in the manufacture of stainless steel, hand-made paper, furniture, perfumes, handloom fabrics, or in one of the farms or gardens. If you are mechanically inclined there are workshops for cars, tractors and trucks. Or you might care to try your hand at tailoring, baking bread, printing (in many languages), carpentry or dairy farming or, if you want to try the really simple life, washing dishes in the dining-room.

There are libraries, reading-rooms, an extensive sports-ground, a large swimming pool and facilities for music, art and photography.

One kind of work is not considered superior to another; none is paid for. All the necessities of life are provided by The Mother, so *sadhaks* are freed from financial problems. The real work is to discover the truth of one's being.

All work must be done in a spirit of service and unselfishness and offered to the Divine, keeping the aim of integral transformation always in the forefront of one's mind. 'To work for the Divine,' says The Mother,

'is to pray with the body.'

There are about 800 children living in the Ashram. The Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education was established in 1952 and provides no ordinary form of education. The Mother says: 'Education to be complete must have five principal aspects relating to the five principal activities of the human being: the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual.' And again: 'The three lines of education—physical, vital and mental — deal with that which may be defined as the means of building up the personality... With psychic education we come to the problem of the true motive of life, the reason for our existence upon earth, the very discovery to which life must lead and the result of that discovery, the consecration of the individual to his eternal principle.'

Years ago, when The Mother had regular meetings with the Ashram children she once told them: 'All you my children live here in an exceptional liberty...no social restraints, no moral restraints, no intellectual restraints, no rules; nothing but a Light which is there.'

Now The Mother keeps to her apartment where she receives *sadhaks* and visitors, appearing in public only four times a year to give *darshan*. She gives interviews, however, and still controls all the activities of the Ashram. In her own words '...the Ashram...has grown up and developed like the growth of a forest and each service was created not by any artificial planning but by a living and dynamic need...'

'The Ashram has been founded and is meant to be the cradle of the new world...'

'The door is open and will always remain open to all those who decide to give their life for that purpose...'

XVII. AUROVILLE

THE MAIN OBJECT of the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo is a Supramental transformation. The Supramental descent which took place the February 29, 1956 was the first step towards it. The establishment of a universal township, "Auroville" (named after Sri Aurobindo), was the second. As early as 1931 The Mother explained: '...once the connection [between the Supermind and the material being] is made, it must have its effect in the outward world in the form of a new creation, beginning with a model town and ending with a perfect world.'

The foundation of Auroville, which intends to be a living embodiment of the ideals of Sri Aurobindo, was laid on February 28, 1968. On this occasion, The Mother stated: 'Greetings from Auroville to all men of good-will. Are invited to Auroville all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life.'

The Charter of Auroville reads as follows:

'Auroville belongs to nobody in particular, Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.

'Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress and youth that never ages.

'Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.

'Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual research

for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.'

According to The Mother, 'Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities.'

Auroville is located about five miles north of Pondicherry. The site selected provides a beautiful panoramic view with the sea on the east and a number of lakes on the west and north. A township providing for 50,000 persons is visualised.

Not only will Auroville be a universal cultural township but it will also provide a design for integrated living—a way towards reorganisation and transformation of life in all its aspects. It will be a place for those who want to evolve consciously. In this lies the fulfilment of present humanity and also a solution to problems with which it is faced today.

The purpose of Auroville is to provide for the gathering of people from all parts of the world who are ready to live according to the ideals of Sri Aurobindo. It will be a place where all human beings of goodwill, sincere in their aspiration, can live freely as citizens of the world, a place of peace, concord, harmony, where all the fighting instincts of man will be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities. The relations among human beings, usually based almost exclusively upon competition and strife, will be replaced by co-operation for doing better, by relations of real brotherhood.

Permanent cultural pavilions of different countries and

the States of India, reflecting the culture of those countries and States, will be established in Auroville. They will represent the culture, architecture, language, art, way of life, natural scenery, etc., of the countries represented. Here one will be in living contact with the cultures of the world and learn to appreciate unity in diversity.

Auroville has been unanimously supported by the General Assembly of UNESCO in Paris—three Resolutions have been passed (in 1966, 1968 and 1970). In their Resolution of 1968 the General Conference invited member-States and international non-governmental organisations to participate in the development of Auroville as an international cultural township designed to bring together the values of different cultures and civilisations in a harmonious environment with integrated living standards which correspond to man's physical and spiritual needs.

Here is a message from the Prime Minister of India, Srimati Indira Gandhi, to Aurovillians:

'Pondicherry was Sri Aurobindo's place of political exile and spiritual unfolding. His effulgent message radiated to different parts of the world from Pondicherry. It is appropriate that seekers of enlightenment from various lands should found a new city there bearing Sri Aurobindo's name. It is an exciting project for understanding the environmental needs for man's spiritual growth. May Auroville truly become a city of light and of peace.'

The Mother emphasised the importance of Auroville when she said: 'Humanity is not the last rung of terrestrial creation. Evolution continues and man will be surpassed.

It is for each one to know whether he wants to participate in the advent of this new species. For those who are satisfied with the world as it is, Auroville has evidently no reason for existence.'

The Mother has also explained how to be a true Aurovillian: 'The first necessity is the inner discovery by which one learns who one really is behind the social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances. At our inmost centre there is a free being wide and knowing who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the active centre of our being and our life in Auroville.

'One lives in Auroville in order to be free of moral and social conventions but this liberty must not be a new slavery to the ego its desires and its ambitions. The fulfilment of desires bars the route to the inner discovery which can only be attained in peace and the transparency of a perfect disinterestedness.

'The Aurovillian must lose the proprietary sense of possession, for our passage in the material world that which is indispensable to our life and to our action is put at our disposal according to the place we should occupy there. The more conscious our contact is with our inner being, the more exact are the means given.

'Work, even manual work, is an indispensable thing for the inner discovery. If one does not work, if one does mot inject one's consciousness into matter, the latter will never develop. To let one's consciousness organise a bit of matter by way of one's body is very good. To establish order around oneself helps to bring order within oneself.

'One should organise life, not according to outer, artificial rules, but according to an organised inner cons-

ciousness because if one allows life to drift without imposing the control of a higher consciousness, life becomes inexpressive and irresolute. It is wasting one's time in the sense that matter persists without a conscious utilisation.

'The whole earth must prepare for the advent of the new species and Auroville wants consciously to work towards that advent. Little by little it will be revealed to us what this new species should be and meanwhile the best measure to take is to consecrate oneself entirely to the Divine.'

To sum up, we may say in the words of Sri Aurobindo:

Yet shall Truth grow and harmony increase
The day shall come when men feel close and one;
Meanwhile one forward step is something gained
Since little by little earth must open to heaven
Till her dim soul awakes into the Light.

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Dharma (1909)

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CHRONOLOGY

August 15, 1872 : Birth of Sri Aurobindo in Calcutta
1877-9 : At English boarding school (Darjeeling)
1879-84 : Manchester, England
1884-90 : St. Paul's School, London
1890-92 : King's College, Cambridge
1892-93 : Return to India. Baroda
1901 : Marriage to Mrinalini Devi
1902 : Revolutionary work in Bengal
1904 : Beginning of Yoga
1906 : Leaves Baroda for Calcutta
December 1907 : First meeting with Yogi Lele
May 4, 1908 : Arrested by the British Government
1908-1909 : The Alipur Bomb Trial
May 6, 1909 : Released from Alipur Prison
February 1910 : Left Calcutta for Chandernagore
April 4, 1910 : Arrival in Pondichery
March 29, 1914 : Sri Aurobindo and The Mother—their first meeting
August 15, 1914 : Publication of the *Arya* (a monthly philosophical magazine) commences
February 22, 1915 : The Mother leaves Pondicherry
April 24, 1920 : The Mother returns and settles in Pondicherry
January 1921 : Discontinuation of the publication of the *Arya*
November 24, 1926 : The Day of *Siddhi*
1926 : Sri Aurobindo goes into retirement, giving the charge of the Ashram to The Mother
November 24, 1938 : Sri Aurobindo has an accident to his leg : a few *sadhaks* now given the opportunity to attend personally on Sri Aurobindo
August 15, 1947 : Independence of India on Sri Aurobindo's 75th birthday
December 5, 1950 : The passing of Sri Aurobindo
1952 : Inauguration of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education
February 29, 1956 : The Descent of the Supramental
February 28, 1968 : *Auroville* : laying of the fundation-stone

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On The Veda
Hymns to The Mystic Fire
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